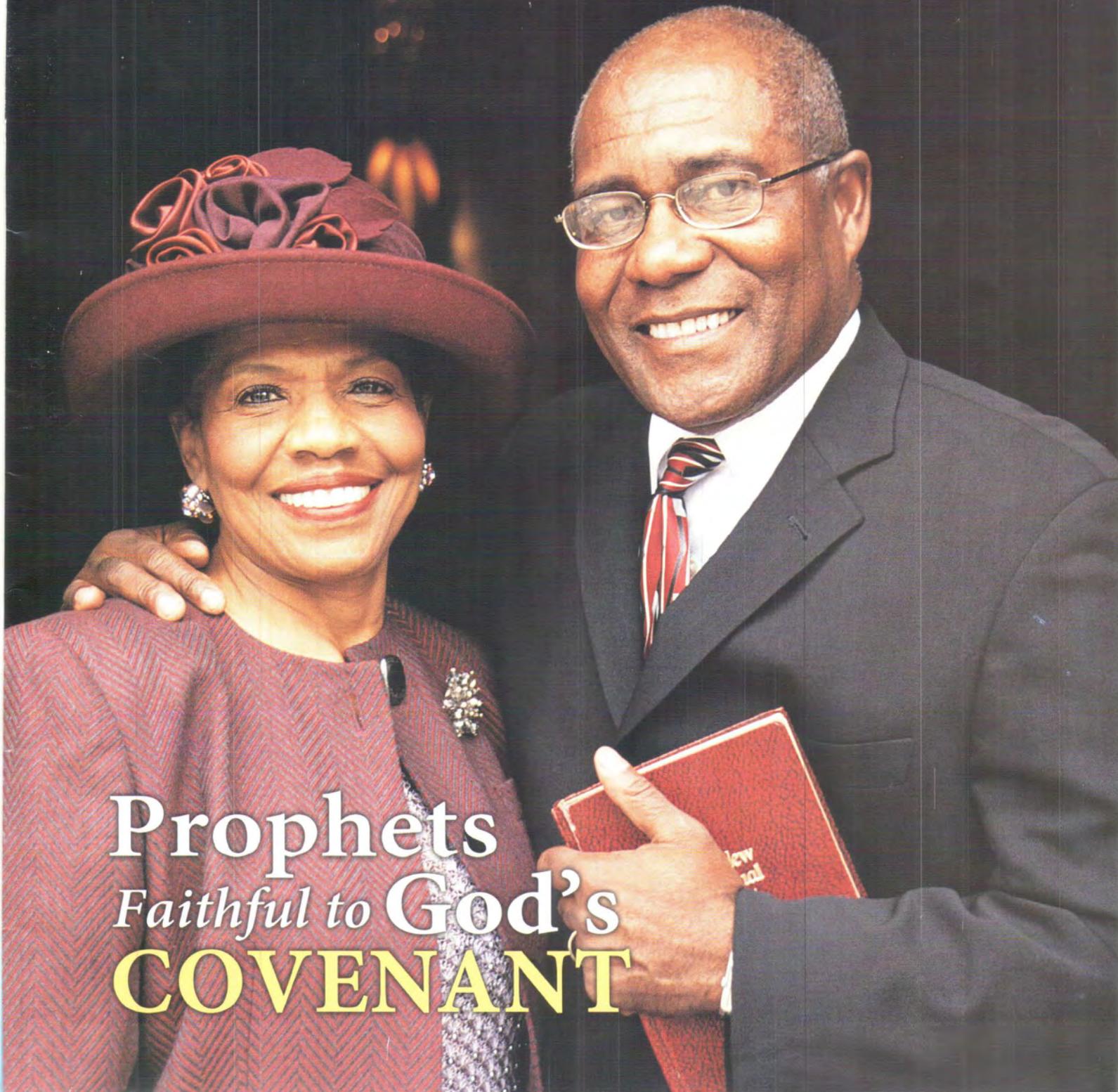


DIRECTION[®]

THE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE FOR ADULTS



Prophets
Faithful to God's
COVENANT

Quarter At-A-Glance March 2021

Prophets Faithful to God's Covenant

This quarter introduces the ministry of the Old Testament prophets. God employs people who live among Israel and Judah to be spokespeople for God. A formal representative of God, the prophet has a message meant to effect social change that conforms to God's desired standards as prescribed under the Law.

UNIT 1 • Faithful Prophets

"Faithful Prophets" has four lessons drawn from Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 and 2 Kings, that explore the reasons prophets were necessary for Israel's history. Moses leads the people out of Egypt, thus fulfilling God's promise to bring the people back to Canaan. In Deuteronomy, Moses gives the people God's promise to give them prophets who will speak God's word to them. Stories about Joshua, Huldah, and Elijah illustrate the fulfillment of God's promise given through Moses.

UNIT 2 • Prophets of Restoration

This unit has four lessons that reveal the compassion of God during the times in Israel's history when the people continually forsook the ways of God. On Easter, Isaiah's prophetic writings and the Book of Luke are used to portray Jesus as the Suffering Servant and the one through whom believers receive salvation. Passages from the prophecies in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Lamentations show the faith of the prophets as they presented new hope to the Israelites.

UNIT 3 • Courageous Prophets of Change

This unit has five lessons. These lessons show the boldness of God's prophets in 1 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Jonah. Israel and Judah were released from captivity and charged to rebuild Jerusalem. God sent prophets to call the people to restore their covenant relationship with God. When the people strayed away from their covenant with God, the prophets called them back.

Moses: Prophet of Deliverance

Bible Background • EXODUS 12:28-50; DEUTERONOMY 18:15-22
Printed Text • DEUTERONOMY 18:15-22 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 77:11-20

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will STUDY Moses' role as a prophet of God in leading the Israelites out of Egypt, REFLECT on leaders who guide us through seemingly impossible situations, and completely RELY on God in resolving challenging situations.

In Focus

Ever since she flipped through that pamphlet on youth homelessness from the display stand at her college, Alex felt the urgency of God's call. That summer, she interned with an organization in Chicago that provided counseling to LGBTQ kids who had been forced to leave their homes. Once she completed her degree, Alex left her hometown in South Carolina and moved to Chicago, where she took a job with the organization.

For the first few months, everything was perfect. Alex loved her work and could see the difference it was making. On weekends she visited her parents' friend Winnie, who lived nearby. But over time, gas, food, and bills started to pile up. Alex took on more shifts and had less time to take care of herself. After three weeks with no days off, she ended up on Winnie's couch, sobbing, her hands so weak she could barely hold the tea she was offered.

"I really want to stay here," she cried, "But I can't do this anymore. I'm so tired."

"Admitting you need help doesn't mean you have to give up. My sister lives in the city," said Winnie. "She's looking for a roommate. We've been talking, and she'd love to live with you. For you, it would be perfect—half rent, less gas, and an amazing roommate!"

"Thank you, Ms. Winnie," breathed Alex, ducking her head to hide her grateful tears. That evening she called Winnie's sister, and the next week they were roommates. She took a weekend to recover, and when she began working again she was careful to leave enough time in her schedule for the people she cared about.

Sometimes God speaks to us through people we wouldn't expect. Who could you reach out to and be vulnerable with?

Keep in Mind

"The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (Deuteronomy 18:15, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Deuteronomy 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

16 According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.

17 And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?

22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

The People, Places, and Times

Mount Sinai. Also called Mount Horeb and has been referred to as the “mountain of God” (Exodus 3:1) and “mount of the LORD” (Numbers 10:33). This mountain and the surrounding wilderness was one of the first stops the Israelites made after escaping from Egypt. They stayed there for about a year

(Numbers 10:11). It would prove to be a place of national trial and triumph. On Mount Sinai, the Israelites experienced defeat (including making the golden calf while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments; Exodus 32) and victory (including ratifying the Ten Commandments; Exodus 19–24) while encamped there.

Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is Moses’ last sermon to the people of Israel right before they finally enter the Promised Land. In these three discourses (Deuteronomy 1-4; 5-26; 27-34), he reiterates the Law handed down on Mt. Sinai. Many sections of this sermon repeat what has already been stated (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5; Exodus 32, Deuteronomy 9; Exodus 21:24, Deuteronomy 19:21). Other sections update the Law from a religion to be practiced in the wilderness to one that is practiced in a stable homeland. Moses looks to the future for the nation. For example, Moses promises that another prophet will follow him, and guides the people in how to accept or reject future prophets.

Background

In this passage, Moses predicts the coming of Christ. The phrases “prophet like me” (Deuteronomy 18:15, NLT) and “prophet like you” (v. 18, NLT) have immediate reference to the line of Israelite prophets. However, they find their ultimate fulfillment in the prophetic ministry of Christ (see Acts 3:19-23). This is one of the earliest references to the coming of the Messiah. Moses himself was considered a prophet of high stature. This early prediction of another “like me” gave the Israelites a glimpse of God’s plan. It put Moses, God’s servant, in proper perspective in the eyes of the people. As great as the works of Moses were, there was still One greater who would come. Moses’ prediction of a prophet “like me” not only points to the greatness of the future Messiah,

but gives insight into what a prophet and leader of God's people should be.

At-A-Glance

1. He Comes from the People (Deuteronomy 18:15-16)
2. He Speaks God's Word (v. 17-18)
3. His Words Come True (vv. 19-22)

In Depth

1. He Comes from the People (Deuteronomy 18:15-16)

Jesus' life proves the accuracy of Moses' prediction that a prophet would arise from "among the people." This phrase can be understood two ways. The primary reference here is to national origin. Jesus was a Hebrew who came through the line of Abraham. The secondary reference highlights the identification of the Messiah as one of the people. Jesus came from common human stock. His earthly parents were ordinary people; His place of birth was lowly; He was reared with the working class; and His occupation (carpentry) was that of a laboring man. Jesus lived among people, understood them (John 2:25), wept with them, and celebrated with them (John 11:35; 2:1-11). Jesus portrayed the characteristics essential for servant-leadership. A person who has not lived among the people is less likely to understand how common people think and what they need.

How have you seen a leader's humble origins affect their leadership style?

2. He Speaks God's Word (v. 17-18)

Moses spoke of a prophet who would have a direct relationship with God (v. 18). Those who are chosen to publicly lead God's people (pastor, missionary, teacher, writer, or Sunday School worker) are called to speak God's words. Just as

Jesus represented God the Father and spoke His words, people in God's service represent Christ and should speak His words. This can only be done when one maintains a close relationship with God through prayer, worship, and studying the Bible.

As a prophet, Moses spoke on God's behalf. Moses was not explaining what God had said in the past like a good preacher does. He came with a new message straight from God. God puts His words in the mouth of His prophets (v.18; Jeremiah 1:7-9). When Jesus spoke, He spoke the words of God. He said in His prayer, "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me" (John 17:8). He assured His disciples "the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (John 14:24). This word has been faithfully passed down, protected by the Holy Spirit, through many generations so that we can read it today.

How do you feel about your current relationship with Jesus? What helps keep it strong? What could make it stronger?

3. His Words Come True (vv. 19-22)

Moses warns against false prophets (v. 20). The test of a true prophet is whether his words come true, though further tests may also be required (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). The death penalty which Moses warns about is played out in the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (see 1 Kings 18:20-40). The false prophets of Baal call on the name of a different god and are put to death after Elijah shows the awesome power of Israel's true God.

Predicting what will come to pass is only one aspect of the prophetic gift. A prophet is one who proclaims the truth, warns, exhorts, and encourages.

Think of a person who is called a modern prophet and consider whether that person measures up to the test in these verses.

Search the Scriptures

1. Where did Moses say a prophet like himself would arise? (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18)
2. What did Moses tell the people of Israel to do about this prophet? (v. 15)
3. What did Moses reveal about the message of this prophet? (v. 18)
4. What test should be applied to a prophet's words? (v. 22)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why does God use intermediaries like prophets to bring His message to His followers?
2. How does God "deal with" (v. 19, NLT) those who do not listen to His prophets? How have you seen this play out in your own life?

Liberating Lesson

Maybe you're heard of the phenomenon in today's society called "call-out culture." When someone perceives an injustice, they will speak out against it, usually on social media. They will set demands for the person or company to correct their problematic behavior, and call on their friends and followers to boycott them until they do. How is this similar to or different from the work of a prophet of God?

Application for Activation

List the characteristics of an effective leader. Which of these characteristics do you possess? Which would you like to acquire? Select a quality. This week, read Philippians 4:13, and seek opportunities to demonstrate the quality you desire.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Say It Correctly

Horeb. HOR-ebb.

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Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Remember God's Acts of
Deliverance
(Psalm 77:11-20)

WEDNESDAY

Instructions for Observing
the Passover
(Exodus 12:43-50)

SATURDAY

Observe Festival of
Unleavened Bread
(Exodus 13:3-10)

TUESDAY

Listen to Moses, Witness
with Authority
(Luke 16:24-31)

THURSDAY

Aliens and Unclean Share
Passover Meal
(Numbers 9:9-14)

SUNDAY

God Leads through
Prophets
(Deuteronomy 18:15-22)

FRIDAY

Consecrate All Firstborn
to God (Exodus 13:1-2;
Deuteronomy 15:19-20)

Notes

Joshua: Prophet of Conquest

Bible Background • JOSHUA 5:13-6:27

Printed Text • JOSHUA 5:13-6:5, 15-16, 20 | Devotional Reading • HEBREWS 11:23-31

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLAIN how Joshua acted obediently to the vision from God, REFLECT on our inefficiencies when challenges overwhelm us, and COMMIT to obeying God especially in challenging times.

In Focus

In the seven years Thomas had worked at his company, his sales team had performed consistently in the top three percent. Thomas had given his best on the job, and he had earned the right to a promotion. Besides, God had placed this desire in his heart long ago.

However, Thomas had been told by a lot of people, mostly Black, that he would never become a district manager at his company. “They don’t promote Black folk to those positions,” he was repeatedly told.

Whenever he heard this, however, Thomas simply replied, “Well, the final decision is really in God’s hands.” Thomas knew what they said was true, but it was a good company to work for and he had put in the time and talent. Thomas was sad that the people who should have been encouraging were most discouraging.

Nevertheless, Thomas followed the desire God gave him and put in his application for the district manager position when it came up in January. He didn’t hear anything for a long time, but he just kept praying instead of letting himself worry.

In the spring, Thomas was called to his supervisor’s office and told the great news: he got the promotion! One of the vice presidents shared with him that the company wanted to reach the African American community. To do this, they would have to hire Blacks in high-level positions. Thomas said to himself, “Yeah, that might have been the company’s reason for promoting me, but I know that God already had His plan in mind.”

Why is it necessary to be faithful if God works His will anyway?

Keep in Mind

“And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour” (Joshua 6:2, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Joshua 5:13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?

14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?

15 And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

6:1 Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.

2 And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.

3 And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.

4 And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.

5 And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times.

16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua

said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

20 So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

The People, Places, and Times

Jericho. Situated in the southern portion of the Jordan Valley, Jericho was near the east-west roadway that connected Transjordan with the hill country of Palestine. Jericho was a popular place because it was an oasis situated in a hot plain, isolated from other major settlements. Over the life of the city, Jericho has served as both a busy urban center and a small campsite. As early as the Stone Age, Jericho was a walled town of about 10 acres. Jericho came to have solid defense ramparts and walls. By Joshua's time, the walls of Jericho, which had been built thousands of years earlier, were still being used for defense of the settlement.

The story of Joshua's conquest of Jericho reports many items of significance for Israel's history and subsequent Jewish and Christian theology. From the narrative of the spies at Rahab's house, one learns that Jericho was a walled city with houses, gates, and windows. Some houses were built into the walls of the city (Joshua 2:1). The account of the stoppage of the Jordan's water at Adamah reports the crossing "right against Jericho" (Joshua 3:16).

Why would Joshua's inevitable defeat of Jericho become such a beloved story?

Background

Joshua, the mighty Israelite military commander, knew His God and believed He

would give His nation the Promised Land. Militarily, God instructed Joshua to plunge into Palestine and divide it into north and south. Jericho was the first target to conquer since it lay directly in the path of their destination. Jericho lay in the valley of the Jordan River. In this lush tropical climate, palm, balsam, sycamore, and henna trees grew. Great and wealthy, Jericho would be an ideal first fruit sacrifice to God.

Once the Israelites had safely crossed the Jordan, they commemorated the event by taking twelve stones from the riverbed and placing them at the next night's campsite. One man from each tribe was to select a stone. The stones were to serve as a memorial for instructing future generations about the Lord's intervention at the Jordan River. Other memorials were established as well. Teaching children about the faith through the use of memorials was an established Israelite practice.

After they crossed the Jordan, the manna which had fallen from heaven each day ceased. Since Israel had reached the land of promise, the daily provision of manna was no longer necessary.

Do you have special memorials or customs to pass on cultural knowledge to the next generation?

At-A-Glance

1. Messenger of the Plan (Joshua 5:13-15)
2. The Plan to Conquer Jericho (6:1-5)
3. Joshua Obeys the Plan (vv. 15-16, 20)

In Depth

1. Messenger of the Plan (Joshua 5:13-15)

Prior to the siege of Jericho, Joshua had an encounter that was similar to Moses at the burning bush. Joshua saw a man standing in

front of him with his sword drawn. Joshua asked the man whether he was an enemy or an ally. "Neither," the man replied (5:14). The man identified himself as the commander of the army of the Lord. Upon hearing this, Joshua fell to the ground face down in reverence. Joshua asked what message the Lord had for him. He was then told to take off his shoes as the place where he was standing was holy.

When has God commanded you to worship in what seemed to be an impossible situation?

2. The Plan to Conquer Jericho (6:1-5)

The residents of Jericho had anticipated an attack and barred their gates. The city was closed to all incoming and outgoing traffic. They were afraid of Israel's might (Joshua 2:8-11).

In giving Joshua instructions, the Lord assured him that the victory had already been won. But, it was not going to be an ordinary capture. They would not take it by direct force, espionage, or siege tactics. Joshua was not going to need battering rams and heavy armor to enter the city. Instead, the men were to walk around the city walls, in silence, once a day, for six days. Seven priests led the procession, escorting the Ark which symbolized God's presence. The Ark went before Israel when they went into battle. In essence, therefore, the Lord went before Israel in every battle.

On the seventh day, the priests and men of war were to walk around the city seven times. After completing their seventh lap, the priests were to blow the trumpets. This would be the signal for the people to shout. The dual purpose of the battle cry was to inspire the troops as it intimidated the enemy. The walls of Jericho would fall flat (v. 5). The men would then be able to capture the city with ease because it would be taken by the power of the Lord.

Sometimes God gives us instructions that may seem so far-fetched, we just can't believe He is really instructing us. We should

remember that God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). He knows what is needed at any given time and He tells us to trust Him. He has never let His people down, as Scripture shows us again and again.

What testimony do you have that confirms God's steadfast deliverance?

3. Joshua Obeys the Plan (vv. 15-16, 20)

Joshua's instructions may have seemed strange to the people, but they performed the first six days faithfully. On the seventh day they got up early. This day they were to increase their daily march and walk around the city seven times. When they had finished marching the seventh time, the priests blew their trumpets and Joshua commanded the people to shout the victory. The Lord had given them the city.

God is able to give us the victory over our enemies when we obey His words and follow His instructions. As long as God's people are obedient to Him, they are witnesses to His mighty power exhibited on their behalf. We may not agree with the Lord's directions for our lives, and we may not even want to accept His principles. But, God is never short on His promises. He will come through for us whenever we submit to Him and follow His word every day!

What encouragement can you give to a new Christian about trusting God?

Search the Scriptures

1. What were the people supposed to do when they heard the horn blow? (v. 5)
2. Why were the people to shout? (6:16)
3. What did the people do on the seventh day? (v. 15)

Discuss the Meaning

1. What significance do you see in the repetition of the number seven in the conquest of Jericho?
2. What lessons can you take from this text about victory in your personal battles?

Liberating Lesson

Miraculous events such as the fall of the wall at Jericho are sometimes difficult for modern-day readers to believe.

To our fore-bearers, however, the fall of the wall at Jericho indicated a stronghold of faith. The Old Negro spiritual "Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho," tells the story of God's assurance of victory in a battle against the enemies of His people. As a group of oppressed people, Israel found strength in a God of deliverance, a God who could destroy the enemy.

It is critical to always remember that God is a God of deliverance and power.

Application for Activation

Look at your own life. Are you taking time to know God now, far in advance of your troubles? Do you take time to praise Him during the day despite what's happening in your life? How is your prayer life? Do you call on God only when you are in need or do you pray just because it is a tradition? These and other questions should be answered this week as you reflect on this lesson and share it with someone else. At the same time decide today that you are going to follow God no matter where He leads and how impossible it may seem to you. As you open your heart to Him, praise Him for answered prayers.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Paradigm. PARE-ah-dime.
Adamah. ah-DAH-mah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Rahab Rewarded for Her
Faithfulness
(Hebrews 11:23-31)

TUESDAY

Jesus Heals Blind Man
from Jericho
(Luke 18:35-42)

WEDNESDAY

Enjoying the Manna and
Local Produce
(Joshua 5:8-12)

THURSDAY

Marching Around the
City of Jericho
(Joshua 6:6-14)

FRIDAY

Rahab and Spies Confirm
Rescue Plan
(Joshua 2:15-24)

SATURDAY

Rahab Saved While Jericho
Is Destroyed
(Joshua 6:22-25)

SUNDAY

Joshua's Successful
Conquest of Jericho
(Joshua 5:13-6:5, 15-16, 20)

Huldah: Prophet of Wisdom

Bible Background • 2 KINGS 22
Printed Text • 2 KINGS 22:14-20 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 25:1-10

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will ANALYZE the prophetess Huldah's message from God for King Josiah, REFLECT on Josiah's behavior after hearing the words of the book of the law, and SEEK godly advice about their future.

In Focus

When Marta's father-in-law moved in with her family, she knew it was going to be a change, but she certainly wasn't expecting it to take the mental and physical toll on her that it did. She ended up moving her transcribing desk into the living room to keep an eye on him; he got anxious if he were left alone for more than fifteen minutes at a time. Marta took care of him and, when she wasn't shuttling the kids around, spent all her time with him. He never voiced his thanks, but sometimes Marta could see sparks of gratefulness in his clouded eyes. As his illness worsened, he needed more and more care; and Marta would often rest against the door frame and pray for strength to serve him with love.

He lived with them for nearly half a year before quietly passing away in his sleep. Marta finally had time to rest and catch up with her old friends.

"It's funny," she told Angelica, a college friend, "I was never comfortable with seniors before. But now I understand them better. There was an older grandfather at the kid's soccer game last night, just standing there, and I was able to help him find a seat and some water. I wouldn't have even felt comfortable offering him anything, before."

"That's wonderful," said Angelica, genuinely impressed. "I never know how to help without sounding awkward."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Marta. "But it's because God let me help my father-in-law for so long that I'm able to help others."

What lessons has God has taught you that you would share with others?

Keep in Mind

"Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD" (2 Kings 22:19, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV 2 Kings 22:14 So Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.

15 And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me,

16 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read:

17 Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

18 But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard;

19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.

20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

The People, Places, and Times

Josiah's Revival. The three decades of Josiah's reign were among the happiest years

experienced by Judah. They were characterized by peace, prosperity, and reform. King Josiah dedicated himself to pleasing God and led Israel in their renewed observance of the Mosaic Law. It is a testimony to the grace of God that a wicked king like Amon could have such a godly son and successor. At the age of 16, in the eighth year of his reign, Josiah personally "began to seek after the God of David his father" (2 Chronicles 34:3). It was at this point that he began to purify Judah and Jerusalem from idolatry by destroying whatever he recognized as not belonging to the worship of the true God (2 Kings 22:1-2). The spiritual reform brought about by Josiah climaxes with renovating the Temple, and, in the process, he rediscovered the Book of the Law in the eighteenth year of his reign and the celebration of the Passover (2 Kings 22:8-23; 23). Josiah's aim to turn his people back to true worship was so intense that he and the entire kingdom renewed their covenant with God.

Background

Following Hezekiah's death (2 Kings 20:21) several kings succeeded him. Among them were: Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1); Amon (2 Kings 21:19); and Josiah (2 Kings 22:1). Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Judah. He reigned 31 years. The Bible affirms that he was one of Judah's best kings (see 2 Kings 22:19). Peace, prosperity, and political reform highlighted his reign. In Judah, the Temple had fallen into disrepair (see 2 Kings 21:4-5, 7, 21). So, Josiah gave consent to repair the Temple by sending Shaphan, a scribe to oversee the renovations (see 2 Kings 22:3-4). While the renovation was going on Hilkiyah, the high priest, found a copy of the book of the Law in the Temple (v. 8). Shaphan read the book of the Law to Josiah, who tore his clothes after hearing the scribe's reading (v. 11). The king was

distressed because he realized that the nation of Judah was far from God in their morality, obedience, and spirituality. Therefore, Josiah called Hilkiah the priest, Shaphan, Ahikam, Shaphan's son, and Asaiah, a servant of the king to inquire of God what the people should do to get right with Him.

At-A-Glance

1. God's Prophetess (2 Kings 22:14)
2. God's Condemnation (vv. 15-17)
3. God's Affirmation (vv. 18-20)

In Depth

1. God's Prophetess (2 Kings 22:14)

Huldah was the wife of Shallum, the wardrobe keeper (either of priestly vestments or royal robes). She lived in Jerusalem, in what was called the second district (not college as in KJV). Apparently, this was in a lower or southern section of Jerusalem. She was consulted on behalf of King Josiah, by Hilkiah the chief priest, Shaphan the scribe and others, following the discovery of "the book of the law in the house of the LORD" (2 Kings 22:8; 2 Chronicles 34:15). Although it is only recorded a few times, God spoke to His people through prophetesses prominently. Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3) are all described as prophetesses.

Huldah accepted the book as the Word of Yahweh, and with His authority prophesied judgment against Jerusalem and Judah after Josiah's death. It is noteworthy that, although both Jeremiah and Zephaniah were prophesying at this time, it is she who was approached on this matter.

Why do you go to different advisors at different times?

2. God's Condemnation (vv. 15-17)

When Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah arrived at Huldah's, she gives them a message from the Lord God of Israel to take back to Josiah. However, the message was not an encouraging one. As Josiah had anticipated, Huldah's prophecy was that of judgment. Jerusalem and its inhabitants would taste evil days, even as the Book of the Law prescribed. The reason for this impending disaster was clear. The Lord God would not tolerate open violations of His law. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. In 586 BC, destruction did come to Judah when Babylonia brought Judah to its knees.

Huldah told the kings' men that God would bring disaster on the land and the people because they had forsaken Him. God wants us to keep our eyes on Him so we won't fall prey to the "gods" of this world. So often we shift our focus away from God onto ourselves, other people, and other things. Let's make sure we are tuned to what the Lord wants to do so we won't be condemned like Judah.

What daily practices help you remember to worship God alone rather than modern idols of work, or comfort, or success?

3. God's Affirmation (vv. 18-20)

As is so often the case, God's prophecy of doom concludes with a glimmer of hope. The prophetess Huldah speaks another word to the messengers for the king (v. 18). Josiah would experience God's mercy and grace because he humbled himself before the Lord and had a tender heart. Josiah humbled himself when he tore his clothes and wept (v. 11) over what he read in the book of the Law. In God's tender mercies, He indicated through Huldah, King Josiah himself would die before these days of horror appeared. Indeed, Josiah's death occurred in 609 BC, four years before Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem. Just one

good leader can put off destruction, and give the organization they lead (whether a family, a department, a church, or a country) a little bit more time to turn back to God.

Where are you a leader? How should leaders use their position of power to influence those who follow them?

Search the Scriptures

1. Whom did the Israelites consult to learn God's will? (2 Kings 22:14)
2. What warning did the people of Israel have for the coming disaster? (v. 16)
3. How does God show Josiah mercy? (vv. 19-20)

Discuss the Meaning

1. How do we know when we are out of God's will? Discuss.
2. What should we do when God confronts us with our sin? Is it right for us to confront others about their sins? Why or why not?
3. What are the "idols" that destroy our spiritual lives?
4. How can we convince unbelievers that the Bible is God's authoritative word?

Liberating Lesson

You may feel overwhelmed and inundated by the amount of information from the 24/7/365 news cycle. From those sources, it seems culture is on the wrong track. We look for reliable commentators and analysts to help us understand the events of the day. We know there must be some absolute moral standards but are not always sure where to look for them.

The biblical teaching in this area is fairly straightforward. Yet surprisingly, Christians allow the world to steal their affections and compromise their values. Too many church leaders have forsaken the awesome task of making the Word of God known in the world today. Thank God for those Christian leaders

who faithfully teach, preach, and live the Word in our urban society today.

Application for Activation

When was the last time you "consulted" with the Lord by way of His Word? It is so important that we study and meditate on God's Word daily. The Bible tells us to "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). One of the most important ways we commune with God is through His Word. If we don't have a consistent Bible study time we can get "rusty" in our study habits.

This week make a consistent effort to spend at least 15 minutes a day studying the Bible. Write down any questions that might arise in your study. Share your questions with your teacher and others during the week.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

- Achbor. **AK**-bohr
- Ahikam. ah-**HI**-kuhm
- Asaiah. ah-zuh-**HI**-uh
- Hilkiah. hil-**KI**-uh
- Huldah. **HUL**-duh
- Shallum. **SHAL**-uhm
- Shaphan. **SHAY**-fuhn
- Tikvah. **TEEK**-vah
- Zephaniah. **ZEF**-uh-**NI**-ah

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Loves Covenant Keepers
(Psalm 25:1-10)

TUESDAY

Entering God’s Promised Rest
(Hebrews 4:1-11)

WEDNESDAY

New Covenant Made with the Israelites
(Deuteronomy 29:1-6)

THURSDAY

Josiah Prepares to Repair the Temple
(2 Kings 22:1-7)

FRIDAY

Josiah Seeks Guidance
to Confront Disobedience
(2 Kings 22 8-13)

SATURDAY

Josiah Leads in Covenant Renewal
(2 Kings 23:1-3)

SUNDAY

Huldah Confirms Coming Judgment;
Josiah Spared
(2 Kings 22:14-20)

Notes

Elijah: Prophet of Courage

Bible Background • 1 KINGS 18-19; MATTHEW 17:1-3
Printed Text • 1 KINGS 18:5-18 | Devotional Reading • LUKE 19:28-39

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will COMPARE Elijah's response to speak to Ahab to that of Obadiah's response to report back to Ahab, GAIN a sense of Obadiah's concerns when reporting Elijah's message to Ahab, and ACT in boldness when speaking the Word of God.

In Focus

When Cris fled her abusive husband, she vowed never to depend on another human. She packed her bags and drove across the country to a new job in a strange new town.

She worked hard and at the end of the day she would sit down with a cup of tea and a book. She went to church, but the closest she ever got to anyone was to Mandy, a single mother living in the same apartment complex. She would nod at Mandy as they passed each other in the halls and quickly turn away with a polite little cough.

As the weeks went by, the polite cough became serious and a throbbing pain settled in her chest. The violence she suffered had taken a toll. A series of contradictory doctors discouraged her and slowly her apartment and solitary life started falling into disarray.

Mandy met her one day as she was catching her breath on the stairs. "Hey Cris! Want a hand with those groceries?"

"No, thanks. Actually... yes. That would be great." She accepted Mandy's help but hesitated a bit to let her into the chaos her apartment had become. Cris rested on the couch and Mandy cooked dinner for them.

"I see where you're coming from," said Mandy, after hearing Cris' story, "but shutting yourself off from other people isn't the best way to go. God made us be part of a community, and that means sharing your struggles with other people and listening to their advice."

Cris nodded. "I can see that now. I thought I'd be safer by myself, but it looks like that wasn't meant to be."

Whom could you reach out to for advice and help?

Keep in Mind

"And [Elijah] answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim"
(1 Kings 18:18, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV 1 Kings 18:5 And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts.

6 So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

7 And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah?

8 And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.

9 And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?

10 As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not.

11 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.

12 And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth.

13 Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?

14 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me.

15 And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day.

16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

17 And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?

18 And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.

The People, Places, and Times

Obadiah. The Obadiah found in 1 Kings 18 is not the prophet and author of the book of Obadiah. This Obadiah worked in King Ahab's administration as a governor, mayor, and one of the top officials. Obadiah held this high position assisting one of Israel's most disobedient kings. However, Obadiah maintained his belief in Jehovah, the true and living God. The Scriptures identify him as a worshiper, one who feared God greatly (1 Kings 18:3). Scholars disagree concerning Obadiah's character. Some call him a hero, while others criticize his timidity, saying he compromised and was afraid to speak out on God's behalf.

Elijah. Little is known about Elijah's birth or family, other than that he came from Tishbe in Gilead. God called Elijah to prophesy, speaking out against Baal worship in Israel and to actively take part in ending this abomination among God's people. Initially, God kept him secluded near the brook of Cherith where he is fed by ravens for six months. As the drought progressed, God connected Him with a widow and her son. God miraculously provided food for them for the next three years (1 Kings 17:8-16). Just before the end of the drought, Elijah called out the prophets of Baal for a showdown on Mt. Carmel. He challenged the people of Israel to serve the winner of the contest. God victoriously proved his superiority over

Baal and the prophets of the false gods were destroyed (1 Kings 18:17-40).

Ahab. One of the most rebellious kings in Israel's history (1 Kings 16:30). He married Jezebel, a Baal worshiper who hated God's people (1 Kings 18:4). She encouraged his worship of the false gods Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 16:31-33). God sent the prophets Elijah and Elisha to warn him, but he refused to listen. His ultimate downfall came when he made an agreement with a foreign king he was supposed to kill and did nothing when his wife had an innocent Israelite murdered (1 Kings 20-21). Both Ahab and Jezebel died gruesome, tragic deaths.

How does God protect His followers when leaders are unjust?

Background

God's Law clearly commanded never to worship false gods (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7), not to invoke their names (Exodus 23:13), not to marry their adherents or practice any of their customs (Leviticus 20:23; 2 Kings 17:15). King Ahab violated each one of these laws during his 22-year reign in Israel. He married Jezebel, a Phoenician Baal worshiper who had altars and a temple built for Baal. This false god of rain and dew was the supreme male deity of the ancient Phoenicians and Canaanites. Their rituals included illicit sex, ritual prostitution, and child sacrifice. God's prophet Elijah confronted King Ahab. The first time Scripture mentions him, he appears before King Ahab announcing a drought to come upon the whole land because of the nation's sin (1 Kings 17:1-7). This one verbal threat by a lone prophet of God challenged the worship of Baal, who was supposed to control the rain. Instead of Ahab and Jezebel acknowledging God and repenting, they were furious. They desperately sent out soldiers to hunt for Elijah to force him to reverse this curse.

How have you pushed back against God instead of acknowledging Him and repenting?

At-A-Glance

1. God's Providence (1 Kings 18:5-8)
2. God's Servant, Obadiah (vv. 9-16)
3. God's Prophet, Elijah (vv. 17-18)

In Depth

1. God's Providence (1 Kings 18:5-8)

Feeling the effects of the drought, King Ahab and his chief servant Obadiah discuss trying to find grass for the royal horses. The king fears for his safety if his horses died—no army to protect him. Ahab and Obadiah agree to search the area in different directions.

As Obadiah combs the area, Elijah, the missing prophet, walks toward him. King Ahab had looked diligently for Elijah for three and a half years, determined to force him to reverse the drought. The leaders in the surrounding countries joined in the massive hunt for the prophet. No one located him. They swore to the king that no individual had laid eyes on Elijah. However, by the providence of God, Obadiah and Elijah travel down the same path. Obadiah recognizes him, then bows with his face to the ground, in fear, reverence, and respect for God's messenger.

When has God caused you to have an unexpected encounter?

2. God's Servant, Obadiah (vv. 9-16)

Elijah asks Obadiah to deliver a message. He wants a face to face meeting with King Ahab. Obadiah responds with excuses. He thinks his master might be suspicious, assuming he knew the prophet's hiding place all this time. Obadiah imagines an upset king, angry enough to kill. He also raises another reason for his

reluctance. Elijah had a reputation of being in one place, and then the Holy Spirit whisking him away to another. Obadiah lacks confidence in Elijah being in this location for a meeting with the king.

Obadiah continues giving reasons for refusing Elijah's request. He calls himself one who truly worships Yahweh, since his youth. When Jezebel tried to kill all of God's prophets, Obadiah hid one hundred of them in caves, supplying them with food and water. The king's servant urges Elijah to realize how much he'd done already and withdraw his demand.

When one's leader is a tyrant, is it better to covertly honor God as Obadiah did or overtly as Elijah did?

3. God's Prophet, Elijah (vv. 17-18)

Elijah refrains from addressing Obadiah's fears and hesitations. Instead, he speaks about the Mighty God they serve. Elijah walks in the assurance of God's presence, his shield of protection. He boldly intends to challenge King Ahab, resting in the sovereignty of God. He promises Obadiah that when King Ahab arrives, he will be in that very spot. Obadiah never says another word to Elijah but proceeds to go and arrange the meeting.

Finally, Ahab and Elijah face each other. The King accuses Elijah of being the one that disturbed and destroyed his kingdom with the drought. He speaks correctly. Elijah had made the "no rain" declaration. However, Elijah places the responsibility right back on Ahab's shoulders. He tells the king about his willfully ignoring and violating God's Law. Elijah calls for a showdown on Mt. Carmel that will prove the superiority of Jehovah over Baal.

When have you spoken boldly in the presence of fear?

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Elijah requesting of Obadiah and what was his response? (1 Kings 18:9-16)
2. What did Ahab accuse Elijah of doing? How did Elijah respond? (vv. 17-18)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Use the Focus Scriptures to point out words that describe Obadiah and Elijah. Contrast the two men.
2. In what ways were both men instruments in the hand of God?

Liberating Lesson

Speaking the truth today, especially to those who disagree with Christian beliefs is not always easy. Elijah walked in such confidence. He struggled at times with negative thinking and depression, but he also listened to God and followed His instructions. Think of Christians that you know that are bold like Elijah. If possible, have a conversation with them about their journey and glean from their experience.

Application for Activation

Take some time this week to examine your circles of influence, in your family, church, job, or community. Have you spoken up about Christ or have you kept your faith private? Pray about how God may want you to change. Ask the Holy Spirit to point out Scriptures this week to give you more wisdom and understanding. Surrender to the Lord and allow Him to do the transforming.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Jezebel. **JEH**-zuh-bell
Obadiah. oh-buh-**DIE**-uh
Asheroth. **AH**-sure-oth

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Elijah with Moses and Jesus
(Mark 9:2-8)

TUESDAY

John the Baptist, the New Elijah
(Mark 9:9-13)

WEDNESDAY

Elijah Sent to King Ahab
(1 Kings 18:1-4)

THURSDAY

Elijah Challenges Baal Prophets
(1 Kings 18:20-26, 30-33, 36-39)

FRIDAY

Elijah in the Wilderness with God
(1 Kings 19:1-8)

SATURDAY

God Commissions Elijah for New Work
(1 Kings 19:9-15)

SUNDAY

King Ahab Meets Prophet Elijah
(1 Kings 18:5-18)

Notes

Salvation is Sealed

Bible Background • ISAIAH 52:13-53:12; LUKE 24:1-35

Printed Text • LUKE 24:13-16, 22-35 | Devotional Reading • PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will IDENTIFY the connections between the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 and the resurrected Christ in Luke 24, AFFIRM the joy of knowing the Suffering Servant is the resurrected Jesus Christ, and SHARE the story of the Suffering Servant, who is the resurrected Jesus Christ.

In Focus

Lisa and Michael's son, Timothy, had been on the organ donor waiting list for five years. He was born with a heart defect and needed a new heart. His parents continually prayed for a new heart to become available. The week of Easter, the hospital called and said they had a new heart for Timothy. His parents rushed to the hospital and waited while the doctors operated on him.

Lisa was anxious for her son but also became very upset as she thought about the parents of the child whose heart Timothy would receive. She could not imagine how sad they must feel. After nine hours of surgery, the doctor reported that the operation was a success. Timothy was in recovery and they could see him in just a few more minutes after the doctors made sure he was settled in his room. The parents rejoiced, but Lisa still could not get the other parents out of her mind. She asked if they could meet the family of the organ donor.

The two sets of parents met in a small private room near the operation wing of the hospital. The other mother wanted them to know that her daughter had died, but a part of her would live on in Timothy. Immediately Lisa's despair turned to joy.

We can often get entangled in our own sense of grief and despair. Where do we find hope to spark our joy again?

Keep in Mind

“And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight”
(Luke 24:31, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Luke 24:13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.

14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15 And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

22 Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;

23 And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.

24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

28 And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

29 But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.

31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

32 And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with

us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

33 And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,

34 Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

35 And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.

The People, Places, and Times

The Suffering Servant. This enigmatic figure arises out of the complex prophecies of Isaiah. Four “songs” celebrate the fate of the Servant of God: He would bring justice to the nations, bring light to the nations, bring healing and forgiveness, and, most of all, He would suffer (see Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). But the Servant’s suffering would be redemptive, for “with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). One song explicitly identifies the Servant as Israel (Isaiah 49:3). In their original context, these songs seem to have been an attempt to explain the harsh suffering the nation of Israel would pass through during their exile. It was not for sins, but for the healing of the nations. But the Servant was also God’s perfect Servant. This perfection transfers the Servant’s identification from the nation to the sinless Christ.

This paradigm makes sense of Jesus’ suffering and transcends the Messianic title in another way. It pointed to the Gentiles, the nations, as the object of healing and forgiveness. It is no accident that the first account in Acts that portrays an outreach to Gentiles uses this paradigm: Philip uses the passage about the Suffering Servant to tell the Ethiopian eunuch “the good news of Jesus” (see Acts 8:26-35;

1 Corinthians 15:3; Philippians 2:7; Matthew 12:18–21).

How do you deal with the suffering that arises as part of your spiritual journey?

Background

It had been three days since the crucifixion of our Lord. He had risen from the dead, showing Himself at the tomb to Mary Magdalene who then told the other disciples. The synagogue hierarchy, as well as the Roman government, was upset at this turn of events. When the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb came into the city and reported to the chief priest and other leaders the things which had occurred, they called a meeting and then paid the soldiers hush money to say that the disciples had stolen the body of Christ (Matthew 28:1–15). The elders also promised to take care of the governor over the guards.

In fear, the disciples were either in hiding or getting out of town. The disciples wondered if they had believed in vain. Yes, there was Mary Magdalene who said she saw Jesus, but perhaps it was only a spirit. The disciples wanted a personal appearance from Jesus. They had such a traumatic experience, what act of God would be required to restore faith? Jesus recognized their need and met two disciples on the Emmaus Road.

How do you react when God blesses you with a miracle?

At-A-Glance

1. The Sullen Conversation (Luke 24:13-16)
2. The Scriptural Exhortation (vv. 22-27)
3. The Surprising Revelation (vv. 28-32)
4. The Sudden Proclamation (vv. 33-35)

In Depth

1. The Sullen Conversation (Luke 24:13-16)

Three days after Jesus was crucified and not all of the disciples heard the good news: He is risen! Instead, many are troubled about Jesus' death. They are grieved at the loss of the Master and disappointed that what they thought would occur—the reestablishment of Jewish power—fell through. At this time, we find two disciples, Cleopas and another on the road to Emmaus, a small town a few miles from Jerusalem.

Into the midst of these disciples' gloom comes Jesus. The Master joins the two of them and begins to walk with them as they are reviewing the events of the past few days. They did not recognize the Savior at the outset, as was the case with others (Matthew 28:17; John 20:14; 21:4). Yet, they are so heavily laden that they take the opportunity to unload their feelings of sullenness to a total stranger.

This is quite a picture of humanity's weakness and God's graciousness. Jesus enters right into the midst of the problems of His disciples and lets them talk through it. The disciples were disappointed and depressed, but Jesus was right there when they needed Him most.

2. The Scriptural exhortation (vv. 22-27)

Once these two disciples finish their story, it becomes their visitor's time to talk. And He opens with a shocker: He calls them "fools" ones who were reluctant to believe the Word of God!

Is that not the problem even today? We tend to pay more attention to portions of Scripture that minister to our present needs. The Jews needed a deliverer. Unfortunately, while looking for immediate deliverance, they did not take into account God's entire program for deliverance which included the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of their Deliverer. And now they were ready to throw out the baby with the wash water.

Jesus starts at the beginning and explains to these disciples everything about Himself that is found in the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Bible—and the “prophets”—which includes historic books like 1 and 2 Kings, major prophets like Isaiah, and minor prophets like Jonah. Hiding in plain sight was the divine message that the things were inevitable for the Messiah before the time of His deliverance would come when He would share in the power and glory of God (vv. 25-26; cf. Luke 22:69).

3. The Surprising Revelation (vv. 28-32)

As the two disciples got nearer the village, they extend customary hospitality to Jesus and He agrees to stay the night with them (v. 29). Before retiring for the evening, the three sit down to have a meal. Even though He is the guest, Jesus plays the part of the host. Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks for it, and shares a piece with each of the disciples (cf. Luke 22:19).

At once these two disciples recognize Jesus for who He is, and Jesus immediately disappears from their presence (v. 31). The disciples realize they should have recognized Jesus all along, just by the way He had explained Scripture to them. Listening to the Lord had been like fire burning in their hearts. They had been filled with joy, enthusiasm, and energy.

4. The Sudden Proclamation (vv. 33-35)

They got up at once and returned seven miles to the place they were escaping—Jerusalem, where the apostles and disciples were gathered. When they arrived, they found the group just as full of excitement as they were. For the Lord was indeed risen from the dead and had appeared to Peter. It was then that the two Emmaus disciples explained how Jesus had appeared to them and their recognition of Him when He broke the bread.

The lesson here is simple. After the Lord reveals Himself to His sullen disciples through

the Word, He proceeds to further encourage their hearts through the revelation of Himself in their experience. To encounter Christ in His Word and in life dispels disappointment and replaces it with hope.

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Jesus help the disciples understand who He was? (v. 27)
2. How did the disciples come to recognize Jesus? (v. 30)
3. What did these two disciples learn from the others gathered in Jerusalem? (v. 34)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why did Jesus conceal His identity from the disciples?
2. Jews looked for a conquering hero. Why was it necessary that the Messiah would suffer?
3. Why was it necessary for Jesus to start with Moses and “expound” (teach, explain, interpret) the prophecies concerning Himself? What elements from the Old Testament might He have explained?

Liberating Lesson

The despairing disciples are seen leaving town or hiding. The Gospel had temporarily ceased flowing in this climate of hopelessness and fear. Those who brought words of hope were shrugged off and discredited until Jesus made personal appearances to the disheartened disciples. What they read in the Scriptures promised a conquering hero. What they ignored in the Scriptures was the suffering Messiah.

Many promises and guarantees have been made to disenfranchise minorities in the United States: African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. The fulfillment of those promises and guarantees has been long in coming. There is often a discrepancy between what was expected and what has been done. Like the disciples, many have simply gone into despair

and started on the “road to Emmaus,” to get away from it all, to forget. Gather members of these and other communities and discuss these questions:

1. How are these three communities (African American, Native American, Hispanic) similar to the disciples?
2. Who are some of the messengers of hope in our communities? Have we listened to them? What has been the general reaction?
3. What should we do with gains already made?
4. What can we do to make further progress?

Application for Activation

Are there promises God has made to you and perhaps fulfilled, but because it is not the way you expected, you might not have recognized them? You may even be walking around in despair because you have not seen what you expected. This week, sit down, write out what you have asked God for, what He promised, and what has happened so far. Look for what might have been hidden from your eyes because you were not looking for what God has done concerning your petition and His promise. Thank Him, and allow yourself to move on!

As you continue to read the Bible thoroughly, find Jesus in every book. His presence and the foreshadowing of His great works are found in every single book of the Bible. Take your pencil, start at the beginning and see how much of Jesus you can find.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Say It Correctly

Cleopas. **KLEE**-o-pas.

Emmaus. eh-**MAY**-uhs.

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Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Isaiah Foretells the
Suffering Servant
(Isaiah 52:13–53:3)

TUESDAY

Jesus, The Suffering
Servant
(Acts 8:26-35)

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Foretells His Death
and Resurrection
(Luke 18:31-34)

THURSDAY

Christ Suffered and Interceded
for Sinners
(Isaiah 53:4-11)

FRIDAY

Jesus, Raised from Death
(Luke 24:1-12)

SATURDAY

Jesus' Disciples Report
the Resurrection to Jesus
(Luke 24:17-21)

SUNDAY

The Risen Christ Appears
to Disciples
(Luke 24:13-16, 22-35)

Notes

Ezra: Faith and Action Preacher

Bible Background • EZRA 9-10

Printed Text • EZRA 10:1-12 | Devotional Reading • EZEKIEL 18:25-32

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONTRAST the people's need for repentance with their joyful response to God's word, BELIEVE that God's truth is eternal, and GROW in determination to serve God in our community and beyond.

In Focus

The official board of First Church called a congregational meeting to discuss the church's constitution. The constitution was written 150 years ago and did not reflect the changing racial structure of the community that the church served.

Deacon Robinson, the moderator, called the meeting to order. He explained to the congregation that the church's constitution had to be reformed if First Church was to survive. Some of the older members were concerned that changing the constitution would mean changing the purpose and character of First Church. However, what was really at stake was the way the church would do ministry in the 21st century.

At one point, old Mr. Johnson stood to speak, "I am the longest attending member of this church. I have been here through three pastors. Change can be a scary word for some people. We are creatures of habit, so it is difficult for some of us to accept changes, whether in our worship style or our personal lives. Certainly one of the most frightening times in our lives is when we move to a new apartment or take on a new job. But I have stayed here through many changes, and I can tell you, they have for the most part, been good ones. This church has a good heart, and we want to follow God. His rules aren't going to change. So maybe ours should."

After three hours of intense discussion and mixed emotions, the congregation gave the board the okay to proceed with rewriting the constitution.

This week we will study God's call through Ezra for the nation Israel to change their lives through religious and moral reform. What are some ways God is guiding you to better walk in obedience to His will?

Keep in Mind

"And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed ... to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land"

(from Ezra 10:10-11, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Ezra 10:1** Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.

3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

4 Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.

5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they swore.

6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

7 And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem;

8 And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated

from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain.

10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

11 Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.

12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.

The People, Places, and Times

Mourning. The ancient Hebrews placed a greater emphasis on external, symbolic acts of mourning than modern Western people do. Upon receipt of bad news or in the presence of sudden calamity it was customary to rend the clothes (2 Samuel 1:2) and to sprinkle dirt or ashes upon the head (Joshua 7:6). Hair cloth, which is scratchy and cheap, was adopted as clothing (Isaiah 22:12). Covering the head or lips also indicated mourning (Jeremiah 13:3; Ezekiel 24:17, 22).

A death in the household set in motion an elaborate ceremony of mourning which lasted a week or more. Family members and their friends gathered around the corpse and indulged in lamentations bordering on hysteria. Professional mourners were often called in for a funeral (Jeremiah 9:17–22; Amos 5:16; Matthew 9:23). In earlier times these were

probably to protect the living from the spirits of the departed, who were greatly feared. By Bible times, however, the professional mourning women were used merely as another manifestation of grief for the departed.

How do you make space to mourn? Why is mourning necessary?

Background

For decades, God sent many prophets to warn Israel and Judah that their disobedience and lack of repentance would ultimately lead to their destruction. These prophecies were fulfilled when Assyria conquered Israel in 722 BC, followed by Judah's fall in 586 BC at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. It was then that the Temple was destroyed.

However, the Lord did not leave them without hope, promising the return of a remnant of the people, and rebuilding of the Temple (Jeremiah 27:22). This fulfillment began in 538 BC when Zerubbabel led the first group to Jerusalem to start rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 1–6). The priest, Ezra, led a second group's return. Both returns were authorized and aided by unlikely sources—the kings of Persia, who had conquered Babylon. In this passage, we see Ezra addressing the people who appear to be heading down a similar sinful path as their forefathers. His focus becomes to lead the people to not only a physical return but a spiritual return of their hearts toward the one true God.

Where do you see God at work in your life calling you back to Him and rebuilding your faith?

At-A-Glance

1. The Proposal (Ezra 10:1-4)
2. The Oath (vv. 5-6)
3. The Proclamation (vv. 7-8)
4. The Affirmation (vv. 9-12)

In Depth

1. The Proposal (Ezra 10:1–4)

In chapter 9, several leaders brought to Ezra's attention that some of the men had married pagan women and reproduced with them. Ezra's response was one of lament. God had faithfully delivered them from the seventy years in exile as promised, and here they were, seemingly determined to return to the evil that led to their destruction.

As was ancient Jewish custom, Ezra tore his clothes, then plucked the hair from his head and beard, fasted, prayed, confessed, and wept loudly as a public expression of his grief and astonishment.

Such a public outcry compelled others to join him. Shechaniah was moved to publicly confess, on behalf of the community, a sin that he did not commit (his name is not on the list in 10:18–43). It is possible, however, that his disdain and grief were still personal, as he may have been related to one of the offenders. He is identified as the “son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam,” and there is a Jehiel listed among the sons of Elam who defied God's law.

Shechaniah's response was filled with hope, support, and admonishment as he proposed a covenant with the Lord—the utmost binding form of commitment. His solution to send away those wives who still worshiped pagan gods, along with their children, was a difficult one to execute but revealed his commitment to holiness, and the law of God.

2. The Oath (vv. 5–6)

Shechaniah's admonition, “Be of good courage, and do it,” was reminiscent of God's command to Joshua as he prepared to lead Israel into the promised land after forty years of wandering, due to their fathers' lack of faith (Joshua 1:6). Generations later, Ezra was now tasked with spiritually leading a remnant of exiled Jews back to the Lord. His call of

repentance meant all of Israel would have to swear to keep their promise, under the threat of severe punishment. Twice it is mentioned he “arose,” indicating Ezra continued to bow before the Lord in mourning.

Even after Israel swore an oath, he did not celebrate—he returned to the room of the high priest’s grandson to resume fasting and mourning because of “the unfaithfulness of the returned exiles” (NLT). This is the way in our lives too sometimes. Even after we realize our mistake and determine to correct it, the guilt and shame of the mistake still need to be atoned for.

3. The Proclamation (vv. 7–8)

Each decision led to another with a broader scope. Shechaniah’s proposal to Ezra led to the oath taken by the leaders and those gathered locally. Now a proclamation was sent requiring all of the returned exiles in Judah to come to Jerusalem. A timeline of three days was given as those furthest away from Jerusalem would be no more than 50 miles away—or three days’ journey. Failure to come would lead to expulsion and confiscation of property, essentially a stripping away of legal rights. Ezra was granted this authority by King Artaxerxes (7:25–26). Ezra knows giving up a wife and her children is a major decision, and some would hesitate to do it. He is insistent on faithfully keeping God’s law, though. If these men do not agree to keep the entire law, they will not be permitted to remain under that law. They will be excluded from the community (by being separated from the congregation) and from the inheritance (by forfeiting their property, especially their land).

4. The Affirmation (vv. 9–12)

As commanded, the people gathered after three days, despite the cold December weather. Ezra records the day as “the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month” (v. 9). This is Kislev 20 on the Jewish calendar, which begins

in the spring, placing their ninth month in the winter, rather than the fall. Because the Jewish calendar is lunar, dates sometimes vary from year to year compared to the common Western solar calendar. However, since we can pin Ezra’s account to a specific year in King Cyrus’ reign, scholars can calculate the date of this particular Kislev 20 as December 19 on our Gregorian calendar (see NLT, v. 9).

The combination of the fear of God’s wrath, and being drenched and cold caused them to tremble. Under these circumstances, Ezra boldly confronted their unfaithfulness and called for their confession and action. The whole assembly agreed. Since it was rainy season (November–March) and the assembly was rather large, it would take three months for all marriages to be investigated. In the end, 113 men (including several priests and Levites) were found guilty of ungodly marriages (vv. 18–43).

Search the Scriptures

1. When did God first forbid Israelites to intermarry and why (Deuteronomy 7:1–6)?
2. Whose idea is it to divorce pagan wives and send them away (Ezra 10:3)?

Discuss the Meaning

It has been said that we do not sin in isolation, which means our individual sin can have communal negative consequences. These consequences can still exist even amid repentance.

1. Who are the people immediately affected by some Israelite men’s sin, and their subsequent repentance (Ezra 10: 3, 11, 44)? Discuss how this potentially impacted them.

2. How do Ezra’s and Shechaniah’s responses to hearing of the sin demonstrate their understanding of this reality?

Liberating Lesson

It is tempting to judge Israel when reading about their cycle of sin, judgment, and repentance. They never quite seem to get it right. Israel's story is our story. Like Israel, we do not sin in isolation; the actions of a few can have dire consequences for the masses. Like Israel, we may often find ourselves in a constant cycle of sin. However, our individualistic approach to holiness hinders us. Our pride prevents us from publicly confessing our sin to one another, therefore, rarely do we see examples of a body or individual willingly confessing the sins of others. Yet Scripture shows that such actions please God, often bringing Israel to a place of healing, true repentance, and restoration.

Application for Activation

When confronted with the magnitude of their sin, the returned exiles took repentance seriously, even though the corrective action would be costly. They had tasted God's faithfulness. He kept His promise to allow them to return. Their reasonable act of service would be to worship the one true God.

Consider your own life. Where have you seen God's faithfulness, grace, and mercy? What sin has He revealed to you lately that requires your attention and repentance? What will the corrective action cost you? Spend time in prayer—mourning, bowing, worshiping, fasting if necessary. Then, "Get up, be strong and take action."

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

- Zerubbabel. zeh-**ROO**-bah-bell.
 Shechaniah. sheh-**KAH**-nee-uh.
 Jehiel. **JEH**-hee-ell.
 Elam. **EE**-lam.
 Artaxerxes. ar-tah-**ZERK**-sees.
 Jehohanan. jeh-**HOE**-ha-non.
 Eliashib. ee-**LIE**-uh-sheev.
 Kislev. **KEES**-lev.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Light to Jews and Gentiles
(Acts 26:19–23)

TUESDAY

Live the New Life in Christ
(Ephesians 4:17–24)

WEDNESDAY

Keep Land Faithful to Godly
Practices
(Leviticus 18:24–30)

THURSDAY

Ignoring God’s Laws Leads
to Judgment
(Zechariah 7:8–14)

FRIDAY

People Anxious to Hear
the Law
(Nehemiah 7:73–8:6)

SATURDAY

People Respond Actively
to the Law
(Nehemiah 8:9–12)

SUNDAY

Committed to a Life of
Obedience
(Ezra 10:1–12)

Notes

Nehemiah: The Captive Cupbearer Rebuilds a Nation

Bible Background • NEHEMIAH 2:11-20; 13:1-22

Printed Text • NEHEMIAH 2:11-20 | Devotional Reading • DANIEL 9:4-6, 15-19

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXAMINE why Nehemiah decided to restore the wall of Jerusalem and reform/revive the Sabbath law, APPRECIATE Nehemiah's feelings and behavior in restoring the wall and reforming Jewish worship, and IDENTIFY ways to restore worn parts of the faith community and revive traditions that honor God.

In Focus

Gathered before Georgia were the leaders of one of the area churches in her denomination. The church was about 20 years old, and until a week ago, they all thought that it was in good condition. Then, the pastor and treasurer had both abruptly resigned, and the remaining church leaders discovered that the church's funds had been seriously mismanaged. The church's checking account was overdrawn by more than \$18,000, and checks were being returned for insufficient funds.

The denomination had called this emergency meeting of the Trustee Board. Georgia, the denomination's chief accountant, had only had two days to prepare for it. She had sifted through the years of statements and reports.

While her days had been spent sifting through piles of paper looking for answers, her evenings had been spent asking God how He wanted her to handle this awful situation. Despite the carelessness that had been shown, Georgia knew that these people were hurting. Yes, she wanted to blame them for not recognizing the church's situation for so long and take some corrective actions, but all of that could wait. What they needed right now was to know that she cared about them and what they were going through.

Georgia wisely sought the Lord's counsel about how to proceed, rather than relying solely on her own abilities. When have you shown this wisdom? When have you wished you had acted on God's counsel?

Keep in Mind

“Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach” (Nehemiah 2:17, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Nehemiah 2:11** So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

12 And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

13 And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.

14 Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.

15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.

16 And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.

17 Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

18 Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem

the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?

20 Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

The People, Places, and Times

Nehemiah. Our only knowledge of this great builder and statesman comes from the book that bears his name. The man, whose name means "God has consoled," was born in exile, which began when Babylonia conquered Jerusalem in 587 BC. Nehemiah grew up in the faith of his fathers, and he loved Israel. Since no mention is made of a wife and since he served in such a high position to a foreign king, he was likely a eunuch.

Nehemiah was well-qualified for the task of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. A true Israelite, he labored for the purity of public worship, the integrity of family life, and the sanctity of the Sabbath. He was a courageous and God-fearing man who labored selflessly and served with an unswerving loyalty to God. After the work had begun, the wall was finished in only about two months.

Persia. Persia's status as a world power was obtained through a succession of military conquests. Cyrus's victories instituted the empire, and the expansions of Darius' reign spread Persian control from the northern coast of the Aegean Sea to the Indus River valley and

from the Caucus Mountains to Egypt. The Jews, who had been taken into exile by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, were allowed to return soon after the Persian king Cyrus conquered Babylonia.

Persian Kings in the Bible and Major Events of Their Reigns		
Cyrus the Great	549 BC	conquers the Medes
	546	conquers Lydia
	539	conquers Babylonia
	538	authorizes Zerubbabel's first wave of returning exiles
Darius the Great	521	gives funds to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple
	515	conquers the Indus River valley
	490	fails to conquer Greece
Xerxes I	unknown	marries Esther
	480	fails to conquer Greece
Artaxerxes I	457	authorizes Ezra's second wave of returning exiles
	445	authorizes Nehemiah's third wave of returning exiles

Background

Nehemiah is the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I of Persia, an honorable and prestigious position of great trust. While serving in this position, Nehemiah receives visitors from Jerusalem and asks them about events going on back home (Nehemiah 1:1–2). They give him a very discouraging report about the disgraceful condition of the people and the deplorable state of the city. The crumbling walls had left the city, the Temple, and the people vulnerable to attack and gave their enemies cause to ridicule. Although Ezra was an excellent spiritual leader, the people lacked political leadership. They needed someone to motivate them, show them where to begin, and to direct their activities. On receiving this news, Nehemiah weeps and

grieves for some days, fasting and praying. He knows he has to do something about the city's crumbling infrastructure, but what and how?

After prayer, Nehemiah is still very distressed and the king asks what troubling him (2:1–2). By God's grace, Nehemiah obtains permission from the king to go to his native country and rebuild its walls and gates. Nehemiah left the comfort of a king's palace to return to his ancient homeland to challenge his countrymen to get busy and reconstruct the walls. Armed with letters of safe passage and a full military escort provided by the king, Nehemiah faced the almost 1,000-mile trip to Jerusalem.

How have you used your position of privilege to help others?

At-A-Glance

1. Survey the Situation (Nehemiah 2:11–15)
2. Calls the People to Work (vv. 16–18)
3. Respond to Opposition (vv. 19–20)

In Depth

1. Survey the Situation (Nehemiah 2:11–15)

Although he has the full support of the king, Nehemiah does not immediately rush into action or expose his plan to the people (2:11–12). Instead, Nehemiah secretly inspects the wall to assess the damage and estimate the work needed to rebuild it. After staying in Jerusalem for three days, Nehemiah embarked at night on a survey of the damage. The walls of Jerusalem were in such a state of ruin that rubble and debris had strewn the valley floor so that he could not even ride his mount through it. During his late-night ride, he finds that the reports he had received were true: The walls of Jerusalem and its gates are in ruins. Nehemiah says nothing to anyone until he first explores the extent of the damage for himself. We can take a page from Nehemiah's playbook when we are facing recovery in our own lives. First, we have to acknowledge the truth for ourselves. Then—and only then—should we tell others.

2. Call the People to Work (vv. 16–18)

Nehemiah calls a meeting of the city leaders and discloses why he has come to Jerusalem. Nehemiah appeals to the leaders' pride in Jerusalem as God's holy city. Next, he appeals to their love for God and their desire not to bring Him shame. He acknowledges God and His divine guidance in the plan to rebuild the wall. Then, he tells of King Artaxerxes' support.

Nehemiah uses the pronoun "we" rather than "you" or "I." Wise leaders understand they must

identify themselves with the need to motivate others to assist them. This reminds us that a Christian can't live an independent life, because we are called to function in the community of believers.

The religious, political, and other leaders overwhelmingly accept Nehemiah's plans. Collectively, they say, "Let us rise up and build" (v. 18). Nehemiah challenges and inspires the people, and God strengthens them to complete the work. Spirit-led projects carried out under spiritual guidance succeed when measured by God's definition of success.

3. Respond to Opposition (vv. 19–20)

Anytime people start the process of recovery, they should expect to meet with some resistance. The Scriptures tell us that Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem tried to stop Nehemiah's rebuilding effort. All three were political leaders from the Persian provinces surrounding Judah to the north, south, and west. Understandably, they did not want Jerusalem to become a strong and well-defended city, because trade routes and economic advantages would shift in favor of Jerusalem. Hence, their attempt to stop Nehemiah was politically motivated.

Nehemiah could have argued that what he was doing had higher political backing. Instead, Nehemiah simply stood on the promises of God. He did not waste a minute of his precious time or energy trading insults with them; he simply spoke the truth. Nehemiah tells them that the land has been given to the Children of Israel, and Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem did not have any right to even be in the land of Jerusalem (v. 20).

Whenever we are attacked by circumstances contrary to God's Word, we need to speak the Word to our tormentors and ourselves. We can do this in boldness and rest in God's promise that we now have a share of that great

inheritance when Jesus returns and God's kingdom finally comes.

Nehemiah worked carefully to bring the Israelite leaders on board with his plan to rebuild. Why not try to make these foreigners into allies?

Search the Scriptures

1. When Nehemiah revealed his plan, what was the people's response? (Nehemiah 2:18)
2. What did the people in Jerusalem do to show that they were ready to follow Nehemiah in rebuilding the wall? (v. 18)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why is it important to begin any task with prayer?
2. Making decisions is a part of life. Sometimes what we decide to do or say forces us to oppose the majority. How do we know whether we have made the right decision? How do we encourage people to stand by their decisions?
3. Nehemiah was able to motivate the other Jews to embrace his vision of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. What factors determine how flexible you are in sharing a vision with people? When are you flexible, and when are you more assertive?

Liberating Lesson

Many American communities are crumbling around the people who live there. Slumlords, a lack of funding rooted in historical inequities, and unethical policing practices account for much of the problem, but cleanliness and maintenance are problems the residents can solve. Should a church's vision for its community include upkeep and maintenance? What are some ways the church can motivate members to clean up and maintain their neighborhoods? What are some ways the church can pressure the cities' leaders as Nehemiah did so that they take action?

Application for Activation

In today's lesson, we read that once Nehemiah safely arrived in Jerusalem, he went around inspecting the city walls at night and conducted a thorough survey of exactly what damages needed to be repaired. If we are truly concerned about rebuilding parts of our lives, we need to prayerfully assess what will be required. This week, make this a target of prayer in your own life. Be honest with yourself. Ask God to show you exactly what steps need to be taken. Only when we change lazy or sinful habits can we be freed to be what God wants us to be.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Sanballat. san-vah-**LOT**.

Horonite. **HOR**-oh-nite.

Tobiah. toh-**BYE**-uh.

Ammonite. **AH**-moan-ite.

Geshem. **GEH**-shem.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Daniel Intercedes for Jerusalem
(Daniel 9:4–6, 15–19)

TUESDAY

Nehemiah Orders Temple Cleansing
and Restoration
(Nehemiah 13:4–9)

WEDNESDAY

Nehemiah Restores Ministries
of Levites, Singers
(Nehemiah 13:10-14)

THURSDAY

Nehemiah Reforms Sabbath
Observances and Practices
(Nehemiah 13:15-22)

FRIDAY

Nehemiah Sets Standards
for Jewish Marriages
(Nehemiah 13:23-27)

SATURDAY

Nehemiah Sent to Rebuild Jerusalem
(Nehemiah 2:1-10)

SUNDAY

Nehemiah Inspires the People to Rebuild
(Nehemiah 13:23-27)

Notes

A Plea for Restoration

Bible Background • LAMENTATIONS 5

Printed Text • LAMENTATIONS 5 | Devotional Reading • LAMENTATIONS 3:22-33

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND why the writer of Lamentations pleaded with God for the restoration of Israel, SENSE the writer's feelings over the oppression of his nation, and PRAY for and engage in the restoration of broken relationships with God.

In Focus

Karen and Tim stood with their neighbors, in shock over the fire that was eating up their apartment complex. As they stared in disbelief, Karen broke down and began to wail, "I can't believe what has happened, we lost everything, and so many people have been displaced from their homes all because of someone's negligence."

The fire had spread quickly, taking one whole building and threatening another. The first responders were still putting out the last flames and seeing to those who had breathed too much smoke. Tim wanted to do something to help comfort his neighbors but didn't want to leave Karen, who was heartbroken over the loss of their home. "It's not just the possessions, Tim. It's our history, our life together, your mother's photo albums, my paintings. And now it's all in ashes," she exclaimed. "How can we rebuild?"

Tim suggested they pray, but Karen was still too angry. Overcome with emotion she asked, "God, where are You in this? What did we do to deserve this?"

Tim held his wife and consoled her. "We need to believe God, Karen. We have to trust His love and His promises to never leave us, and that He will sustain us through this crisis." Tim heard Karen take several slow, calming breaths. "Let's just start with figuring out where to stay for the night."

Karen nodded, "Let's call the pastor and his wife. They'll know someone with a guest room."
How has God's Word given you hope amid a crisis?

Keep in Mind

"Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old"
(Lamentations 5:21, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Lamentations 5:1** Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach.

2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.

3 We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.

4 We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us.

5 Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest.

6 We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.

7 Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.

8 Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.

9 We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness.

10 Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.

11 They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah.

12 Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.

13 They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood.

14 The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick.

15 The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.

16 The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!

17 For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim.

18 Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.

19 Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.

20 Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?

21 Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.

22 But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.

The People, Places, and Times

The Exile. Israel and Judah were told that God would lead them away into exile if they became unfaithful to the covenant He made with them through Moses (Deuteronomy 28:36-37, 64; 29:28). When they did break that covenant, Israel and Judah underwent periods of exile and were removed from the Promised Land. Consequently, the Jews were scattered throughout the known world, where they became known as the Diaspora, which is the Greek word for “scattering.” The Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Judah was also defeated three times by the Babylonians. In 605, King Nebuchadnezzar took the royal court and the ablest men of Judah into Babylon. He returned in 597 BC. During the final fall of Jerusalem to Babylonia in 586 BC, the city was burned, and the remaining people of Judah were deported, from which only a remnant returned 70 years later. The phrase “the Exile” is most often associated with the 70-year Babylonian captivity of Judah. The lasting effects of the Exile were profound. Aside from the stress of being removed from their homes and loved ones, while in captivity they had the status of slaves, were unfamiliar with the language, and were sometimes required to worship idols (Daniel 3:4-7).

Background

While some scholars question the authorship of Lamentations, it is traditionally attributed to the prophet Jeremiah as an appendix to his book of prophesy. Jeremiah was known as

the “weeping prophet” who spent over forty years calling out Israel’s displeasing ways and pleading with them to repent and avert the promised doom for disobedience. After years of predicted warnings of destruction to their homeland, the worst had come to pass. Jerusalem and Judah had been destroyed, and the Israelites were overtaken by enemies on every side until they were dispossessed from their land and taken into captivity. The major theme of Lamentations 1-4 expresses personal and community cries to God for their affliction. However, right in the middle of those cries, Jeremiah digs deep and pivots to place his hope in the God of his salvation (Jeremiah 3:21-26). Jeremiah provides a voice to their overwhelming grief: repentance and hope in God’s love and mercy because of His covenant. The book of Lamentations continues to serve as a significant part of Jewish life. The entire book is read publicly as a part of an annual solemn observance to remember the Temple’s destruction in 587 BC (Jeremiah 52:12-13).

How are Negro spirituals, hymns, or music from the Civil Rights Movement connecting points between past and current struggles?

At-A-Glance

1. A Plea to Consideration (Lamentations 5:1-6)
2. A Plea For Sins (vv. 7-16)
3. A Plea For Mercy (vv. 17-22)

In Depth

1. A Plea for Consideration (Lamentations 5:1-6)

Jeremiah, as an eyewitness to the calamity, paints the scenes of the devastation through these laments. The people of Israel were enduring great horror and punishment. Such disgrace included loss of their inheritance. Those

God commanded them to protect and provide for (widows and orphans) were unprotected as a result of their sins rooted in idolatry and apostasy. The prophet’s petition was for the Lord God to intently look upon the reproach and suffering of His covenant people. In essence, all the curses for disobedience God proclaimed through Moses were realized (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). God’s commands are sure and yet He provided Israel with opportunity after opportunity through the voice of His prophets to repent, turn from their wicked ways, and return to Him. Israel suffered consequences for no longer depending on God as the source of their life, provision, safety, and identity.

How can we look at troubling times through the lens of God’s Word and realize what went wrong?

2. A Plea For Sins (vv. 7-16)

In his distress, Jeremiah calls out that his generation’s suffering was a direct result of the sins from past generations. When God formed Israel as a nation, He warned them that iniquity would follow them through generations (Exodus 20:4-5, 34:6-7). But note that God is not temperamental and would later refute the Israelites’ idea that the suffering experienced in the current generation was a result of their ancestors (Jeremiah 31:29-30, Ezekiel 18:1-5).

The prophet’s lament in these stanzas shares how the basis of their community life had been uprooted and was in peril. The elders were not esteemed or in their rightful place to execute justice in their land. The women were sexually assaulted. There was no one to protect them because the young men were burdened from survival. On behalf of the community, Jeremiah woefully cries out that there is no joy in living, and the glory of Israel is gone as past and present sins are taking their toll.

How can we accept responsibility before God and others for our sins and turn around to do what pleases Him?

3. A Plea For Mercy (vv. 17-22)

Jeremiah expresses how he and his people are heartsick over what they have experienced and are at the end of themselves because the home in which they placed so much of their identity as a people is destroyed. He ends this last stanza of the lament by transitioning his hope to God. He reminds himself of God's power and authority in that His throne remains forever. God's heavenly throne continues even after God's earthly throne in Jerusalem is gone. As any human would amid the depth and length of this suffering, Jeremiah questions why God continues to allow their suffering. Although he feels forsaken by God, he still unshakably believes that God is eternal and almighty. He pleads in true penitence for God to show mercy by restoring and renewing His people and their land. Jeremiah strikes a balance between owning the nation's sins, remembering God's love and mercy, and—with human limitations—still questioning if God will still reject his pleas.

In what ways has God made His love and mercy known to us?

Search the Scriptures

1. How does Jeremiah open his prayer for God's attention to their suffering (Lamentations 5:1-6)?
2. Where does Jeremiah shift his lament to reflect on God's power (v. 19)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Does Jeremiah's reflection of his people's suffering capture the pain felt by all of the Jews? Is he effective?
2. How does remembering God's sovereignty shift the pleas in this lament to hope in His mercy?

Liberating Lesson

As a community, we have our part for action and inaction as it relates to the status of socio-economic conditions where we live. We are empowered to make our communities safer and more economically sound by working cooperatively, and as in the past, the Church must lead the way. As a people, we have survived the atrocities of slavery, segregation, and systemic injustice with God as our source and strength. As a resilient people, we have to continue to pass down the heritage of how to strategically fight and pray—working across the generations—to realize the true transformation and restoration God promises when we look to Him.

Application for Activation

Life gets discouraging and lamenting on the ills of our world is a common natural response. But after acknowledging the pain, we must turn that complaint to action. There are so many ways for us to get involved individually and collectively to make a social impact. Get to know legislators at every level of government and keep them accountable to their campaign platforms. Develop faith-based programs that share the Gospel or join existing programs that serve the common good. As we engage in social media platforms, focus on solutions and help shift the conversation from the negative to how to make life better.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Diaspora. dee-AS-pore-ah.
Edomite. EE-dum-ite.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Praise for God's Wonderful Works
(Psalm 111)

TUESDAY

God's Blessings Intended for All
(Zechariah 8:18-23)

WEDNESDAY

The Lord, Our Sovereign
(Psalm 102:12-22)

THURSDAY

Plea for Mercy for Jerusalem
(Psalm 102:12-22)

FRIDAY

Mourn the Destruction of Zion
(Jeremiah 9:17-22)

SATURDAY

God's Mercy and Love Never Ends
(Lamentations 3:22-33)

SUNDAY

Remember and Restore Us
(Lamentations 5)

Notes

Micaiah: Speaking Truth to Power

Bible Background • 1 KINGS 22:1-40 | Printed Text • 1 KINGS 22:15-23, 26-28
Devotional Reading • 1 JOHN 3:23-4:3; DEUTERONOMY 18:19-22

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will IDENTIFY with Micaiah's boldness in declaring the word of the Lord, ASPIRE to be like Micaiah when speaking the word of the Lord, and COMMIT to tell those in power what the Lord has said.

In Focus

Martin Fairchild stared at the spreadsheet. There was no way around it, his family would not be able to go on a vacation this year. There just was no money for it. He thought about all the fun vacations they had had in years past and how much the kids looked forward to the week of adventuring. Even though they were teens now and too cool to admit it. But with the extra costs of college admission tests and application fees, plus a new transmission for the car, there just wasn't the extra money.

He broke the news to his family at dinner. The kids quickly offered new ways of getting the money.

"What if we just borrow some money from Uncle Phil?" Raymond asked.

"What if we skip just a week or two of tithing?" Denise asked.

Mrs. Fairchild shook her head. "Your father has made the wisest decision he can in this situation."

Martin nodded to his wife, thanking her for the support. "We are not going into debt just to go someplace. And we are certainly not going to forget to give back to the Lord. I know it's not what you want to hear, but it's what God has provided for us this time."

How have you followed God's guidance even when others didn't like what God had to say?

Keep in Mind

"And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak."
 (1 Kings 22:14, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV 1 Kings 22:15 So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king.

16 And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?

17 And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.

18 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?

19 And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.

20 And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.

22 And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.

23 Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.

26 And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son;

27 And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread

of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.

28 And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

The People, Places, and Times

Ramoth-gilead. This border city between Aram (Syria) and Israel, modern Tel ar-Ramith, is located on the eastern side of the Jordan River. It is called Ramoth-gilead or Ramoth in Gilead to distinguish it from another city also named Ramoth, which was in the Negev (1 Samuel 30:27). It was declared a city of refuge by Moses (Deuteronomy 4:43) and provided pastureland for the Levites (Joshua 21:38). The city changed hands several times between Syria and Israel. Ahab notes that Syrians occupy the city, even though it belongs to Israel (1 Kings 22:3). He fails to recover it and the Syrians later cement their control of it (2 Kings 10:32-33).

Benhadad. This king of Syria adds to the tumultuous political intrigue of the time. King Asa of Judah bribes Benhadad to break his treaty with King Baasha of Israel and form a treaty with him instead (1 Kings 15:18-20). Later, he attacks Samaria, the capital of Israel. This attack and his attack the following year fail, as the Lord shows His might to defend His people (1 Kings 20). Finally, Benhadad falls ill and asks the prophet, Elisha, if he will recover. Elisha prophesies that he will not and the king's messenger Hazael brings this prophecy about by smothering Benhadad (2 Kings 8:7-15).

Background

In 1 Kings 22, we find the kings of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms having trouble accepting the Word of God from His prophets. The king of the North, the evil Ahab, now holds the upper hand, while the king of

the South, the God-fearing Jehoshaphat, has become his vassal. By treaty, Jehoshaphat is under obligation to help Ahab in any way he asks. Syria was presently at peace with Israel and Judah but held a section of land called Ramoth-gilead. After three years of not receiving Syria's promised tribute, Ahab wants to go to war against Benhadad, the Syrian king. Ahab asks Jehoshaphat, "Will you join me in battle to recover Ramoth-gilead?" (1 Kings 22:4, NLT).

Jehoshaphat has no alternative other than agreeing to help Ahab. But wisdom prevails and Jehoshaphat wants counsel from the Lord (v. 5). Ahab agrees to listen to a god but not the God of Abraham; instead, he listens to the prophets of his own state religion, prophets of Baal (v. 6). These men are false prophets who tell Ahab what he wants to hear. Jehoshaphat wants to hear from a true prophet of God, not these pseudo-prophets, so he asks Ahab if such a prophet is available (v. 7). Ahab then calls his officials to bring forth Micaiah, the son of Imlah (vv. 8-9). This passage is the only place Micaiah is mentioned in Scripture.

At-A-Glance

1. Micaiah's Prophecy (1 Kings 22:15-18)
2. Micaiah's Vision (vv. 19-23)
3. Micaiah Imprisoned (vv. 26-28)

In Depth

1. Micaiah's Prophecy (1 Kings 22:15-18)

Once a true prophet knows the word of God, no one can prevent him from delivering the message. Micaiah did not avoid God's words even when they were unwelcome, discouraging, or negative. No matter if it cost him his life, Micaiah was committed to being true to God and His Word. When Micaiah sarcastically told

Ahab to attack and be victorious, the king knew something was wrong because Micaiah never agreed with Ahab's prophets (vv. 15-16). Ahab knew his false prophets were only saying what he wanted to hear and he knew if the truth was to be heard, it was going to come from someone who really knew God. Ahab demanded the truth of Micaiah though he really didn't want to hear it.

Micaiah reported the opposite of what the false prophets had been saying. He told Ahab that he would be killed and his army scattered. This battle, according to Micaiah who spoke on behalf of the Almighty God, would be a disaster. Although Ahab asked for a true word from God, when it was spoken he pushed it aside and blamed the prophet for always being against him.

When you ask God in prayer for the truth about yourself, are you willing to accept His answers?

2. Micaiah's Vision (vv. 19-23)

The prophet spoke about a vision. Micaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne surrounded by a host of angelic beings. These angelic beings were not there to advise God; instead, they served as witnesses of God's omniscience and omnipotence. The Lord asks how He can persuade Ahab to fight Ramoth-Gilead. One spirit came forth with the plan to lie to the king through his prophets. Then Yahweh gave him permission to go and do so.

Ahab sought to suppress divine authority and truth. God in His omniscience affected His sovereign will by allowing this "lying spirit" to feed the king's own destructive ego through the untruths of his prophets. God gave Ahab what he wanted—his own wish instead of God's truth—and it led to Ahab's death. Our God is the God of those with pure hearts as well as those with perverse hearts. God can and will use any means necessary to carry out

His sovereign will (John 12:40; 2 Thessalonians 2:11; Exodus 14:4, 8).

3. Micaiah Imprisoned (vv. 26-28)

Ahab didn't like what Micaiah said so he did what all tyrants do. He put him in prison to shut him up. When a person or a nation stifles the truth by silencing those who speak out for the truth, it is denying a basic right. But also, it is halting the very flow of truth that might be its own salvation. Ahab did not see that Micaiah was warning him of defeat and death. Ahab was too bent on doing what he wanted. But killing a man who tells the truth does not change the truth. Truth will conquer and often with deadly accuracy.

Micaiah was the kind of person who usually had the last word. His final warning to Ahab in verse 28 was, "If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me." Micaiah had real confidence in the accuracy of the message he received from God. There are times when we have to stand up for what is right and true, even if everyone else is playing loose with the truth.

Shall we follow the way of the crowd and serve ourselves or shall we wait on the word of the LORD however He chooses to send it?

Search the Scriptures

1. Did Micaiah yield to the pressure of the status quo or did he serve the Lord? (v. 15)
2. Can a prison cell stop the word of God from coming to fruition? (vv. 26-28) Explain.

Discuss the Meaning

1. Micaiah resisted the pressure to agree with the rest of those in his profession. He endured the rebuke of the king. He stood for truth at high personal costs. Discuss the reasons for standing firm for the truth. What are its dangers? What are its rewards? Can you cite examples of how being truthful has paid off well? Or, how lying has caused disaster? (The lies of Watergate

illustrate how many people can be brought down by not facing the truth immediately.)

2. Micaiah's prophecy of the divine council shows us a spirit offering a plan of lying and Yahweh approves of this plan. However, we know from parts of Scripture that God hates lying tongues and outlaws false testimony as one of His chief laws. Can God ever be a liar or endorse lying? Discuss.

Liberating Lesson

We live in a society that encourages excuses and glorifies lies. When someone tells the truth, especially biblical truth, most people do not want to hear it. People who want to live in lies and deception often lash out at the person telling the truth. Sometimes it hurts to hear the truth because then we might have to admit we are wrong or confess a sin. To stand for the truth in a difficult situation can be hard. Many times God is the only one pleased with our honest decision. Christians must always weigh the risks of being truthful against the consequences of getting caught in a tangle of lies and inconsistencies. Commit to stand for the truth and speak it in love, no matter the consequences. What statement would your church make to its community about the truths it stands for?

Application for Activation

Micaiah was called to deliver some hard truth. He spoke boldly but also spoke with love for the king and love for the people. Truth must be spoken, yet the Scripture exhorts us to speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). It is also necessary to pray and ask God for the best time to speak the truth. God directed Micaiah at this particular time to speak to these kings. When we decide to speak the truth, let's make sure that God—not our flesh, our desire to get back at someone, or our need to dump on

someone—is the motivation prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Is there something you've been holding back that God wants you to say? What's your next step?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Say It Correctly

Micaiah. mi-KIE-yuh.
Jehoshaphat. jeh-HOE-shaw-fat.
Ramoah-gilead.
RAH-moth-**GILL**-ee-add.
Benhadad. **BEN**-haw-**DOD**.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Elisha Prophecies Truth
to King Jehoshaphat
(2 Kings 3:9-17)

TUESDAY

Kings Propose Battle Against Aram
(1 Kings 22:1-6)

WEDNESDAY

Micaiah Resists Pressure
to Prophecy Falsely
(1 Kings 22:7-14)

THURSDAY

A Lying Spirit Brings Disaster
(2 Chronicles 18:18-22)

FRIDAY

King Ahab Suffers Fatal Injury
(1 Kings 22:29-40)

SATURDAY

Jehoshaphat Promotes Peace with Israel
(1 Kings 22:41-46)

SUNDAY

Prophet Micaiah Speaks the Truth
(1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28)

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Isaiah: Offering Hope for the Future

Bible Background • ISAIAH 29

Printed Text • ISAIAH 29:13-24 | Devotional Reading • JEREMIAH 29:10-14

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONSIDER how God's promise of mercy will triumph over God's judgment, BELIEVE that an essential characteristic of God's nature is forgiveness, and REJOICE in the manifestation of God's love in our own lives.

In Focus

Pamela was in a bind and needed help with an unexpected car repair, so she called in a favor from her friend Aisha who was always willing to lend a helping hand. What Pamela didn't know was that Aisha was fed up with being her emergency fund and had already determined the next time she made one of her 9-1-1 calls for financial help she was not going to help. The reason: Pamela was not a good steward over her finances and was known for making poor choices. Aisha loved her friend but for her well-being and the sake of their friendship, she had to set that boundary. Also, Pamela was slow to return what she borrowed, and when she did, there was always an excuse for not repaying the full amount.

She called Aisha and asked for a five hundred dollar loan and said: "I promise I will pay you back next week when I get paid. I will set it up to send electronically."

Aisha thought, "My Father in heaven is rich, but I am not your bank!" But instead, she responded, "Girl, I don't have the full amount, but I will give you half. I am so sorry that's all I can do right now."

"I understand," Pamela said, "I have been to your well too many times. I need to make changes."

If someone was a repeat offender, would you continue to give your resources to help them?

Keep in Mind

"They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine" (Isaiah 29:24, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 29:13** Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

14 Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.

15 Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?

16 Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?

17 Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?

18 And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.

19 The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

20 For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off:

21 That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.

22 Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale.

23 But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall

sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.

24 They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

The People, Places, and Times

Isaiah. One of the greatest prophets of his time, Isaiah had a vision of God and was called by God to do God's work bringing his nation to repentance to save it from a whirlpool of destruction. His very name means "Yahweh is (the source) of salvation." Isaiah came to the people with messages of judgment tempered with hope. He ministered for 60 years or more and prophesied during the reign of five kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. He pleaded with the people to turn from their wicked ways back to a loving God who would forgive and restore them. Isaiah saw the deliverance of Jerusalem from her enemies, the Assyrians. It was through his prayers and by the intervention of God that Jerusalem was spared from being destroyed. But even this great show of God's mercy and protection did not sway the people back to the worship of Yahweh alone.

Lebanon. In biblical times, Lebanon was synonymous with the cedar trees that grew there. Cedars were most often referred to as "the glory of Lebanon" (Isaiah 35:2; 60:13). The trees grew very tall (Isaiah 2:13) and had plenty of branches to make shade (Ezekiel 31:3). Much of the Temple, Solomon's palace, and public buildings in Jerusalem were made from Lebanon's cedar.

Background

For sixty years, Isaiah served as the prophet in Judah; he stood as the voice of God amid the people's disobedience and his message was to call them back to God. At the start of

Isaiah's divine appointment, Judah experienced military and financial strength. As a result, the elite disregarded God's commands—especially in their treatment of the poor, widows, and orphans—as well as their arrogance. Then neighboring Assyria grew in political and military power. Rather than turn to the God of their salvation for refuge, Judah's government leaders looked to the surrounding nations for safety, which was an insult to God.

Isaiah 29 opens with the prophet making a sorrowful declaration upon Jerusalem using the alias Ariel, which means "lion of God." Isaiah predicted how God would deal with Jerusalem's disobedience. The holy city would be under siege and in mourning because of the coming distress at the hand of their enemies as punishment for their idolatry and self-centeredness. But the message also shifts focus that after enduring punishment, He would also handle those enemies who would rise against His chosen people (vv. 5–7).

Have you experienced times where you thought God's help wasn't needed?

At-A-Glance

1. Far From Center (Isaiah 29:13–16)
2. Return to Center (vv. 17–21)
3. Return to Covenant (vv.22–24)

In Depth

1. Far From Center (Isaiah 29:13–16)

God caused the false prophets, rulers, and seers to fall into deep delusions for choosing to follow after darkness. As a result, Judah was unable to understand the word of the Lord and brought into a drunken stupor (vv. 9–12). Isaiah called them out for their hypocrisy, lip service, and religious performances. The Lord would go on to pronounce spiritual judgment against them

through Isaiah, saying that their worship of Him was misguided. While Judah followed what had become man-made rituals, they failed to reach His heart. Further in their conceit, Judah's leaders thought they could outsmart and hide from God and live without His wisdom. He warned that they would soon be met with sorrow for being so high-minded. The Lord God reminded them that nothing is hidden from Him. He is the potter, the one who fashioned and created everything.

What are some instances when worship becomes routine?

2. A Return to Center (vv. 17–21)

The Lord shifts the message to bring forth hope for what is to come. God delivers the message through Isaiah that He would turn from judgment to restoration of Judah. God did a review of His covenant and promised that if the people repented, they would be restored. They would see fruitfulness in the land; the deaf would hear and understand what the Lord says, the blind will see and have the ability to read, those that would humble themselves for Him would be filled with joy and the poor would rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. In contrast, those who were oppressive, corrupt, evil, and deceivers would be killed and banished from the land. The people would be brought back to their place of dependence and trust in the Lord God because their idols would be destroyed.

How does God's promise of redemption give us hope today?

3. Return to Covenant (vv. 22–24)

God reinforces His message to the Children of Israel by reminding them of their forefather Abraham. Although He chastises the people for their waywardness, He assures them that they would no longer live in shame and spiritual poverty. God would continue to fulfill His promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and that his seed would

be great in the land (Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–5). If God’s chosen people would return to a position of worship and awe of God, then the spiritual plug would be removed to comprehend and follow God’s commands. God’s people need only remember to look for how God has remained faithful to the promises He made to Abraham, all those hundreds of years ago. With those blessings of wealth and progeny fulfilled, even those who scoffed at God and ignored His instruction would change their ways.

What does it mean for us that God would remind Judah of His promise to Abraham and reaffirm the nation’s position as Jacob’s descendants?

Search the Scriptures

1. What was God’s accusation against Judah (Isaiah 29:13)?
2. How did Judah insult the Lord (vv. 15–16)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How can we examine the sincerity of our private worship and watch out for hypocrisy in our public worship?
2. What are the themes of hope in verses 17–24 that connect with your faith to trust God in every situation?

Liberating Lesson

God’s love is boundless and He freely lavishes His grace on those who would receive it. God’s kindness is intended to lead to repentance. However, He will allow circumstances and experiences to chastise and bring us to a place of surrender. After chastisement, God lovingly restores. What would happen if our current system of justice followed God’s model? The intent of the criminal justice system should not only be to punish for offenses, but to be effective it should also be restorative. Offenders should have access to programs within the system that rehabilitates—bringing mental, emotional, and

spiritual healing that gets to the root causes of deviant behavior for true transformation. Essential to restoration and cultivating honorable citizens is access to education that teaches life skills and provides opportunities to be productive members of society rather than breeding criminalization. Look for ways your small group or church can support a charity working toward criminal justice reform.

Application for Activation

When you consider God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ, how can you focus your attention on making disciples? How can you mentor and support individual or group their development? Is there a person or population you feel called to serve? What hope from your testimony is an indicator of what you can offer to bring healing to another soul?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Sennacherib. seh-**NACK**-rib.
 Mosaic. mow-**SAY**-ik.
 Assyria. ah-**SEER**-ee-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Discipline the Immoral Person
 with Respect
 (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

TUESDAY

Uphold Justice for All Peoples
 (Exodus 23:1-9)

WEDNESDAY

Seek and You Will Find Me!
 (Jeremiah 29:10-14)

THURSDAY

Lip Service Is Not Enough
 (Mark 7:1-8)

FRIDAY

Jerusalem Punished and Rescued
 (Isaiah 29:1-8)

SATURDAY

Judah, Blind to God's Ways
 (Isaiah 29:9-12)

SUNDAY

Israel Will Enjoy a Bright Future
 (Isaiah 29:13-24)

Notes

Jeremiah: The Suffering Preacher

Bible Background • JEREMIAH 37-38

Printed Text • JEREMIAH 38:14-23 | Devotional Reading • JEREMIAH 38:7-13; 39:15-18

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will IDENTIFY Jeremiah's hesitation to give controversial advice to Zedekiah, SENSE Jeremiah's apprehension when talking to Zedekiah, and COMMIT to giving challenging godly advice.

In Focus

Walter was stuck between the proverbial "rock and a hard place." Walter still liked to hang out with his single friends, reveling in his former life, but sought to change his ways, especially for the sake of his marriage. In the past, Walter used his brother Ronald as a cover without his knowledge and rationalized that it was just more comfortable for him not to know so he could avoid the lecture. He hadn't meant to do it again, but then his single friends planned a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Jamaica. Walter promised this would be the last time he tried to cover up his actions with these friends, and told his wife just he and Ronald were going for brother time.

While out at a family function, Tonya asked, "So Ronald, how are plans for your trip to Jamaica? Walter told me you all would be using our timeshare." Ronald was at a loss for words and gracefully excused himself from Tonya to calm down.

Later, Ronald confronted his brother "Hey man, enough is enough, I am not going to be a part of your lies and deception. If you don't tell Tonya the truth, I will!"

Walter replied, "Ronald, what do I do? I just wanted to get away and have some fun with the fellas, and I figured if Tonya thought you were going, she would not ask too many questions."

Walter had no idea how to get himself out of the mess he made, both with his wife and with his brother, but he could not bring himself to face the truth.

Which is harder to expose the truth or remain silent?

Keep in Mind

"Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?"
(Jeremiah 38:15, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Jeremiah 38:14** Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that is in the house of the LORD: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me.

15 Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?

16 So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, As the LORD liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life.

17 Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house:

18 But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.

19 And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me.

20 But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver thee. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live.

21 But if thou refuse to go forth, this is the word that the LORD hath shewed me:

22 And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy

feet are sunk in the mire, and they are turned away back.

23 So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire.

The People, Places, and Times

Jeremiah. The son of a priest, Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, a village three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Jeremiah received his calling as a prophet in 626 BC during the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign. The Book of Jeremiah reveals the inner turmoil and conflict out of which Jeremiah delivered his prophetic burden. Jeremiah resisted his call to prophetic ministry, citing his youth as an obstacle (Jeremiah 1:6-9). But God's will cannot be resisted. Jeremiah followed his calling faithfully, but the road was hard. He was rejected by his people (Jeremiah 15:10). He was frustrated by their hardheartedness (Jeremiah 5:3). In spite of all of the difficulties that Jeremiah experienced, he found that he could not resist God's call to prophesy. He had to declare the word of the LORD as the LORD had directed him. It was a compulsion. It was a dynamic, powerful inner motivation that made him prophesy. "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jeremiah 20:9).

Background

Jeremiah, whose name means "Yahweh appointed," was set apart by God as a prophet from the womb (Jeremiah 1:5). For over forty years he was God's mouthpiece as he called out judgment against Judah for their wickedness. In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim's eleven-year

reign, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to provide a written account of everything spoken about Israel, Judah, and all the nations from the time of King Josiah until that present which included His reminders of the disaster to come. God's objective was to extend mercy if hearers would only repent (Jeremiah 36:1-3). King Jehoiakim and his officials heard the prophetic word but rather than repent, the scrolls were burned (Jeremiah 36:1-25).

In spite of the tough words he had to deliver and personal pain experienced, Jeremiah followed through with everything the Lord commanded. In the last days of Jerusalem King Zedekiah, a weaker king was in power and the Lord sent word through Jeremiah that although Judah looked to Egypt as an ally, the other nation would leave them to fend for themselves. He further warned that Judah's nemesis—the Chaldeans—would prevail against them, burn down the city, and scatter them as exiles. However, this destruction would be averted if the king and his leaders would turn back to the Lord. The officials were angered by his prophecy and sought to paint Jeremiah as a traitor to the Chaldeans; he was beaten and thrown into prison (Jeremiah 37:1-16).

What does it mean to speak truth to power?

At-A-Glance

1. A Final Interview (Jeremiah 38:14-18)
2. A Final Response (vv. 19-23)

In Depth

1. A Final Interview (Jeremiah 38:14-18)

King Zedekiah on more than one occasion privately sought out Jeremiah to hear what the Lord had revealed to him. The king had other prophets who told him what he wanted to hear regarding Judah's national security. But those

prophets did not align with what the Lord spoke through Jeremiah, who proved to be His true prophet. The Lord delivered Jeremiah from his officials through King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 37:17-21). Jeremiah would find himself in trouble with the king's officials again for delivering the Lord's proclamation of calamity for disobedience and coming Chaldean siege. He was considered a trouble maker who caused unrest in the land and was thrown into a dry cistern by the king's men. The king would later rescue Jeremiah from death, but he would be once again locked up (Jeremiah 38:1-13).

King Zedekiah sought to show honor for the word of the Lord and had Jeremiah brought to him at the Temple to inquire what the Lord might say through him. Jeremiah was hesitant to answer because he recognized that Zedekiah would probably not listen to his counsel. His officials had great power and influence and wanted Jeremiah dead. The king promised in their one-on-one conversation that neither he nor his men would kill Jeremiah because the king wanted to hear what the Lord said. Jeremiah gave the Lord's word by advising the king and his officials to surrender to the Babylonians so that they may live. However, if they did not heed his counsel from the Lord, the city would burn, and they would not escape.

How do you discern when to speak and when to be quiet?

2. A Final Response (vv. 19-23)

After hearing Jeremiah's prophetic word to surrender, King Zedekiah in confidence shares with Jeremiah that he fears what will happen if he follows the instructions given by the Lord. Jeremiah assures the king if he and his officials obey the Lord, the crisis will be suspended and they will be saved. However, if he refuses, the Lord revealed that the Chaldeans would burn the city and the people would be taken captive by Babylon. Further, Jeremiah tells the king

that he and his officials would bring disgrace upon themselves as the people who trust them realize they had misled them. Their wives who are the life-givers and their sons who represent their bloodline would be captured. The king and all of his officials would be destroyed. King Zedekiah led Judah through habitual disobedience and bad advice, and Jeremiah foretold the consequences of those decisions. God still provided an opportunity to change their ways if they would only ask for and receive God's mercy.

What are some reasons people dismiss godly advice?

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Jeremiah's response to King Zedekiah's request to hear from the Lord (Jeremiah 38:15)?
2. What was the Lord's advice to King Zedekiah through Jeremiah? What was His warning (vv. 17, 20–21)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Given Jeremiah's experience as a prophet, was he right to question King Zedekiah's request? What did the king expect to hear from Jeremiah?
2. Are there times when you have been the recipient of advice you did not want to receive but the Lord confirmed it was from Him? How did you respond?

Liberating Lesson

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke many times about the dangers of keeping silent. There are times when God will compel His people to speak truth to those who will not receive it favorably, but we must stand for righteousness even if it costs. Some believers live in parts of the world where they are faced with persecution daily for boldly living their faith. Those of us blessed with religious freedom must continue

to pray and support those who do not have the same freedom. Think of ways your small group or church can help people living in countries where Christianity is actually illegal. Even on our side of the world, we must be intentional to equip ourselves and others in the spirit of God's love to share and defend our faith in the public square amid opposition.

Application for Activation

In our world, we still hear the chant "no justice, no peace," because there is a need to keep speaking out against systemic injustice. The Church must champion against injustice because we are recipients of God's mercy and made equal at the Cross of Jesus. No matter the race, color, or creed injustice against any people does not reflect the God who created humanity in His image with the capacity to love without limit. There are plenty of causes in need of individual and collective voices for social change. Commit to sharing your time, talent, and resources as an individual, a class, or a church to bring God's kingdom of righteousness in the earth.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Ebed-melek. eh-BED-meh-LEK.
Zedekiah. zeh-deh-KYE-ah.
Jehoiachin. jeh-HOY-ah-kin.
Mattaniah. mah-tah-NYE-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Apostles Speak Truth to Council
(Acts 4:13-22)

TUESDAY

Prophet Jeremiah Is
Arrested and Imprisoned
(Jeremiah 37:11-16)

WEDNESDAY

Ebed-Melech's Trust in
Jeremiah Honored
(Jeremiah 38:7-13; 39:15-18)

THURSDAY

Jeremiah Reaffirms
Prophecy of Zedekiah
(Jeremiah 37:17-21)

FRIDAY

Jeremiah's Last Days in Jerusalem
(Jeremiah 38:24-28)

SATURDAY

Jerusalem Destroyed; People Exiled
(2 Kings 25:1-12)

SUNDAY

Zedekiah Must Submit
to Babylonian Conquest
(Jeremiah 38:14-23)

Ezekiel: Street Preacher to the Exiles

Bible Background • EZEKIEL 18

Printed Text • EZEKIEL 18:1-9, 30-32 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 147

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXAMINE behavior in which we blame others as the cause, COMMIT to be responsible for our own behavior, and ENGAGE in responsible behavior that finds favor with God.

In Focus

Alex and Andrew grew up watching their father, Mason, come home drunk. Sometimes Mason would scream at their mom or them or sometimes just go to bed to sleep it off. They saw him miss work because of hangovers and then have nothing to do in the evening but drink some more.

When Andrew moved out of the house, he prided himself on how he could drink responsibly. He would go out for drinks with the guys after work and enjoy himself at a weekend party. It was hard living on his own, though, and soon his treat of a nightcap turned to more and more drinking. Andrew was worried about what he saw his own life becoming, but what could he do? He had never had a positive role model to show him how to deal with life's hardships. His dad had been an alcoholic and now he was borderline too. What had anyone really expected to happen?

Alex watched as his brother descended into the same path their father did. Even though Alex was the spitting image of his dad, they were very different in temperament. Knowing that he would likely have a problem with alcohol if he tried it, he decided to completely abstain. There were plenty of fun things to do with his friends that didn't involve drinks.

How have you followed in your parents' footsteps? When have you decided specifically to not follow their example?

Keep in Mind

“Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Ezekiel 18:1 The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying,

2 What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

3 As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.

4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

5 But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right,

6 And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman,

7 And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment;

8 He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man,

9 Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD.

30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

The People, Places, and Times

House of Israel. This is a phrase used to address the Israelites. It is used throughout the Bible, primarily by the prophets such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos. The phrase is often referred to when the Lord through the prophets, begins to speak to Israel. The phrase is normally used as a way of gathering the Israelites' attention before speaking to them. Many examples in the Bible support this theory (Jeremiah 3:20; Ezekiel 33:11; Amos 5:25).

Proverb. A proverb is a short, wise saying used for a long time by many people. The proverbs and the lessons they taught were passed down from generation to generation. It was a condensed parable or fable that was sometimes presented to clearly teach a lesson. The proverbs of the Israelites and other people of the east were primarily "similitudes," which present their wisdom as a pair of truisms that are similar to each other (e.g. Proverbs 26:11). Many proverbs are generally true, as opposed to absolutely consequential. Most are in this category of true (Proverbs 17:22), while others were false (Ezekiel 18:2). The main purpose of a proverb was to help families instruct to their young.

Many proverbs can be found throughout the Bible. The Book of Proverbs lists many wise saying of kings and powerful leaders. Most of these are short, compact statements that express truths about human behavior.

When have you seen a proverb play out in your life?

Background

The Prophet Ezekiel lived during the Babylonian exile and was active as a prophet for approximately 20 years from 593 BC to at least 573 BC. Ezekiel lived as an exile according to the title of the book that bares his name (Ezekiel 1:1-2), he was carried away as a captive with

Jehoiachin (1:2; 2 Kings 24:14–16) in about 597 BC. His prophetic call came to him in the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s captivity (593 BC). Ezekiel held a prominent place among the exiles, and was frequently consulted by the elders (Ezekiel 8:1; 11:25; 14:1; 20:1). In the ninth year of his exile, he lost his wife by some sudden and unforeseen tragedy (8:1; 24:1, 18). According to the information in the book’s opening, he was the son of the priest Buzi (1:3) and his name in Hebrew meant “God strengthens (this child)” or possibly, “May God strengthen (this person).” Because he was of a priestly family, he probably had a good education, especially in the Law, and his father may even have had some influence in Jerusalem. The time and manner of his death are unknown.

At-A-Glance

1. God Reminds Judah of His Sovereignty (Ezekiel 18:1–4)
2. God Reminds Them What is Righteous (vv. 5–9)
3. God Reminds Them of their Personal Responsibility (vv. 30–32)

In Depth

1. God Reminds Judah of His Sovereignty (Ezekiel 18:1–4)

The prophets had warned of God’s judgment for generations. Because of that, the captives blamed their ancestors for their problems. They complained that God was punishing them for something their parents had done, quoting an old Jewish proverb, often used when a person was having trouble and it didn’t seem like he’d done anything to deserve it. They failed to realize they were even worse than their ancestors (Jeremiah 16:12). They remembered only the sins of the past, forgetting their sins

of the present. Some White Americans tend to have a similar problem. They readily admit the past sin of slavery but protest that they had nothing to do with it. They complain about the demands of Blacks, forgetting their present injustice.

God forbade Judah’s complaining. First He reminded them that He is God. He is in charge, and if the people were living in faith they would recognize His work. Even when people rebel, God is in charge of their souls. Second, He assures them that only those individuals who rebel against God will die. He is not unjust. Out of mercy, God waited for generations, looking for repentance. Finally, He had to send His judgment. Each individual soul is responsible for its own sin and will be judged accordingly.

Why do we often feel we are being punished for someone else’s missteps?

2. God Reminds Them What is Righteous (vv. 5–9)

However, just because a person has a right to stand as an individual in God’s hand doesn’t mean all his problems are over. It means he’s got to watch how he lives. It means he’s got to stick to the standards. It means he’s got to uphold the Law.

If you don’t want to stand there with your knees wobbling, if you don’t want to stand there with fear and trembling, you’re going to have to do your bit to live in God’s way. The greatest of the commandments is to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbor as yourself. The examples of the commandments we should keep (18:6-8), quite naturally, fit both categories: loving God and loving our neighbor. God never intended anything else.

How do you remind yourself what the right thing to do is?

3. God Reminds Them of Their Personal Responsibility (18:30–32)

God does not enjoy punishing the wicked. He sends punishment so the wicked will repent. When they do repent, He gives them life and hope. Repentance works in reverse too. The previously righteous man who turns to a wicked life opens himself to God's judgment.

God concluded His comments with a promise. If any wicked man would turn from his wicked ways his life would be saved. The choice was theirs. "Why do you want to die?" God cried. "Seek me and live!" (cf, Deuteronomy 30:19; Amos 5:4). Hinting at the coming Gospel of Jesus Christ, God promised a new heart and a new spirit to any who would live in faithful obedience to Him.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Christian has an even better opportunity to live righteously than the people of Judah during the time of Ezekiel. But modern Christians have the same problem that Ezekiel's hearers had. They have an attitude of self-righteousness, complaining about the sins of others without examining themselves.

Why do we not do the right thing, even after we are given good advice?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did God say the old proverb should not be used? (Ezekiel 18:1-4)
2. What did God say the people of Judah needed? (v. 31)
3. Does God enjoy punishing people? (18:32) Explain.

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does God do when you try to turn from your old ways, but keep slipping back?
2. God had described Himself as "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:7). Now He says individuals pay for their sins, specifically saying the parents' sin does

not lie on the child. Scripture tells us that God is unchanging (Hebrews 13:8). Why does God seem to be changing His methods? Was He not satisfied with the previous arrangement? Is He admitting that He had made a mistake? Explain.

Liberating Lesson

Many people are familiar with old superstitious sayings passed down through generations. These may include sayings such as: seven years of bad luck for breaking a mirror; you will go to jail if your foot is swept by a broom; you will have bad luck if a black cat crosses your path, or good luck if you eat black-eyed peas at the start of a new year.

If we live our lives according to these kinds of sayings, we not only keep ourselves in bondage, but we also keep generations of our descendants in bondage too. As children of God, we must realize that no superstition or old saying is more powerful than God. On the contrary, we must depend totally on God, because He holds our complete destiny in His hand.

Application for Activation

Think of problems in your life that you feel were caused by someone else. To what extent have you contributed to the problems yourself? What attitude should you have toward people who cause problems for you? What can you do to ease these problems?

Look at the problems you have caused yourself. What attitude does God want you to have toward these problems? What can you do to correct them?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Jehoiachin. jeh-**HOY**-ah-kin.
Buzi. **BOO**-zee.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Treat Each Other Fairly
(Deuteronomy 24:14–18)

TUESDAY

Taking Personal Responsibility
(Jeremiah 31:27–30)

WEDNESDAY

The Child Who Sins Suffers Punishment
(Ezekiel 18:10–13)

THURSDAY

The Righteous Child Is Rewarded
(Ezekiel 18:14–18)

FRIDAY

All Are Accountable for Their Sins
(Ezekiel 18:19–24)

SATURDAY

God Is Compassionate and Fair
(Ezekiel 18:25–29)

SUNDAY

Repent and Live Righteous Lives
(Ezekiel 18:1–9, 30–32)

Notes

Jonah: Do the Right Thing

Bible Background • JONAH 3
Printed Text • JONAH 3 | Devotional Reading • JONAH 2

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will SURVEY Nineveh's response to Jonah's message, SENSE how the people of Nineveh felt after hearing Jonah's message, and ENGAGE in repentance and right behavior after hearing God's warning.

In Focus

Darrell had never managed to break loose from his neighborhood gang. They were known for thefts in the area and boosting anything from bikes to phones to cars. Darrell knew stealing was wrong. But, he reasoned, maybe the victim deserved what was coming to them, or he needed the goods more than they did. There was always an excuse.

Then one day, he opened his door to see two police officers. "Mr. Parker," one officer said. "We have a search warrant; we have reason to believe your son, Miles, stole a bike."

Darrell kept his hands still and visible as the cops searched his small apartment. "Do you know where your son is now?"

"Getting groceries, sir."

"Do you think he's mixed up with gangs?"

"No, sir."

"We'll be back in a few days to speak with him."

"Yes, sir." Darrell finally breathed again when the officers left. He knew the cops didn't really have anything on Miles. They had come to scare him. The officers very well could have found the wallet he stole from a guy yesterday. He saw just how close he had come to destruction and how his actions could cost his son his freedom or even his life.

Darrell and Miles had a serious talk that night. Darrell apologized for his reckless behavior. For the first time in years, Darrell prayed to God for freedom from his gang life.

What causes people to make sudden true, lasting repentance?

Keep in Mind

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

(Jonah 3:10, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Jonah 3:1** And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

The People, Places, and Times

Nineveh (NIN-eh-vuh). The site of the ancient city of Nineveh has now been excavated thoroughly. Occupational levels on the site go back to prehistoric times, before 3100 BC. The

city was founded by Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-10) and served as the capital of the great Assyrian Empire for many years. Its fortunes rose and fell as Babylonia and Assyria struggled with each other for the dominant position in the ancient world. During some periods Babylonia was stronger, while the Assyrians gained the upper hand at other times.

At the time of Nineveh's greatest prosperity, the city was surrounded by a circuit wall almost eight miles long. This "great city" (Jonah 1:2) had an area sufficient to contain a population of 120,000, as indicated in Jonah 4:11 and 3:2. As a result, it would have required a "three days' journey" to go around the city, and a "day's journey" would have been needed to reach the city's center from the outlying suburbs, just as the Book of Jonah reports (Jonah 3:3).

Although God spares Nineveh when they ask for forgiveness after Jonah's message, in 612 BC Nineveh was destroyed, as prophesied by other Hebrew prophets, especially Nahum. Nahum specifically cites Nineveh's idolatry (1:4) as cause of its destruction, as well as Assyria's habit of enticing other nations into idolatry (3:4).

Background

God called His prophet Jonah to cry out against a neighboring nation, the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. Jonah disobeyed God and attempted to run away from His service. In spite of all this, when Jonah's situation appeared hopeless, God prepared a great fish to rescue him.

Jonah was saved from death by grace. God not only saved his life but also restored Jonah to his position as a prophet. Jonah failed God, but God did not give up on Jonah. God had a job that He wanted Jonah to do, and Jonah's failure did not disqualify him for the mission.

God's ultimate purpose was to rid Nineveh of evil. He sent Jonah to warn the Ninevites of their impending destruction. God would end the evil of Nineveh through divine judgment or, if they repented, through divine mercy.

Why do we often misunderstand God's plan, especially for people we consider our enemies?

At-A-Glance

1. God's Forgiveness (Jonah 3:1–5)
2. Prayers to God (vv. 6–9)
3. God Relents (v. 10)

In Depth

1. God's Forgiveness (Jonah 3:1–5)

After his experience on the boat and in the belly of the great fish, Jonah was finally ready to submit to God's will. God gave the reluctant prophet a second chance. Once again God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh and announce His judgment against the city. This time Jonah readily obeyed God and made the 500-mile journey from the sea to Nineveh. When the prophet arrived in the city, he immediately began to proclaim the message of God's judgment to the inhabitants.

Nineveh and its surrounding suburbs had a circumference of about 60 miles. It would take about three days for a person to travel through the entire city and suburbs on foot. Jonah walked through the city shouting out God's message, "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed." Before he had completed one day's journey, an astonishing event occurred. The people of Nineveh heard Jonah's words, believed his report, and repented of their sin.

When has God given you a second chance? How did you use it?

2. Prayers to God (vv. 6–9)

People today believe that repentance is simply apologizing for sins, but the unbelievers in the lesson text knew that to please God, they had to demonstrate their faith by actions reflective of repentance. As an external sign of their repentance, all the people fasted (cf. 1 Samuel 7:6). They clothed themselves in sackcloth, a coarse material made from goat's hair (cf. Genesis 37:34). Everyone from the king to the lowest beggar participated in the acts of repentance (Jonah 3:6). The people hoped that God would show compassion and turn away from His fierce anger (v. 9). Even the animals were not allowed to eat or drink.

How do you show you are truly sorry when you mess up?

3. God Relents (v. 10)

When the Ninevites humbled themselves and made their outward expressions congruent with their inward sorrow, God saw that they had turned from their evil ways. Then God turned aside from His anger and had compassion on them. The Lord extended His mercy to them by relenting from the destruction they so richly deserved. He extended His grace by giving them what they could never deserve, forgiveness. The conversion of Nineveh is the high point in the book of Jonah. The Ninevites not only heard God's word, but they also believed. God forgave Nineveh just as He forgave Jonah.

God is ready to forgive anyone and everyone willing to turn away from their sins and submit to His will. Are you ready?

Search the Scriptures

1. Jonah walked through Nineveh proclaiming that in 40 days the city would be destroyed. How did the people of Nineveh respond to the prophecy of Jonah? (v. 5)

2. When God saw the response of the Ninevites, how did He respond? (v. 6)

Discuss the Meaning

1. The Ninevites were cruel and very wicked people. What did they do to deserve God’s mercy and kindness? What can we do to earn His mercy and kindness?

2. What does it mean that a perfect God “changed His mind” and “repented of the evil”?

Liberating Lesson

Jonah’s sin was believing that these people were unredeemable and the Jewish people were the only true people of God. Many Black people have difficulty forgiving White people for their atrocities during the days of slavery.

Revelation 7:12 says that people of all races, cultures, and languages will one day stand together before the throne. Shouldn’t we be practicing now for that great day?

Application for Activation

Jonah described God as being merciful, compassionate, and patient with the faults of others. Christians are supposed to be physical expressions of our spiritual God to a physical world. This week, look for people to whom you can demonstrate mercy, compassion, and patience.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Say It Correctly

Nahum. NAY-hum.

Assyria. ah-SEAR-ee-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jonah’s Experience Foreshadows Christ’s
(Matthew 12:38-42)

TUESDAY

Nineveh’s Repentance:
A Lasting Message
(Luke 11:29-32)

WEDNESDAY

Jonah Turns Away from God’s Call
(Jonah 1:1-12)

THURSDAY

Sailors Make Vows to the Lord
(Jonah 1:13-16)

FRIDAY

Jonah Resents God’s Grace
Toward Others
(Jonah 4:1-5)

SATURDAY

God’s Compassion Overrides Jonah’s
Personal Comfort
(Jonah 4:6-11)

SUNDAY

God’s Mercy Prevails
(Jonah 3)

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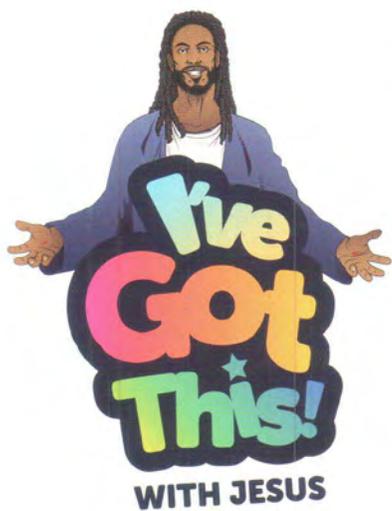


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